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#114

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THE SKYBOX STORY!

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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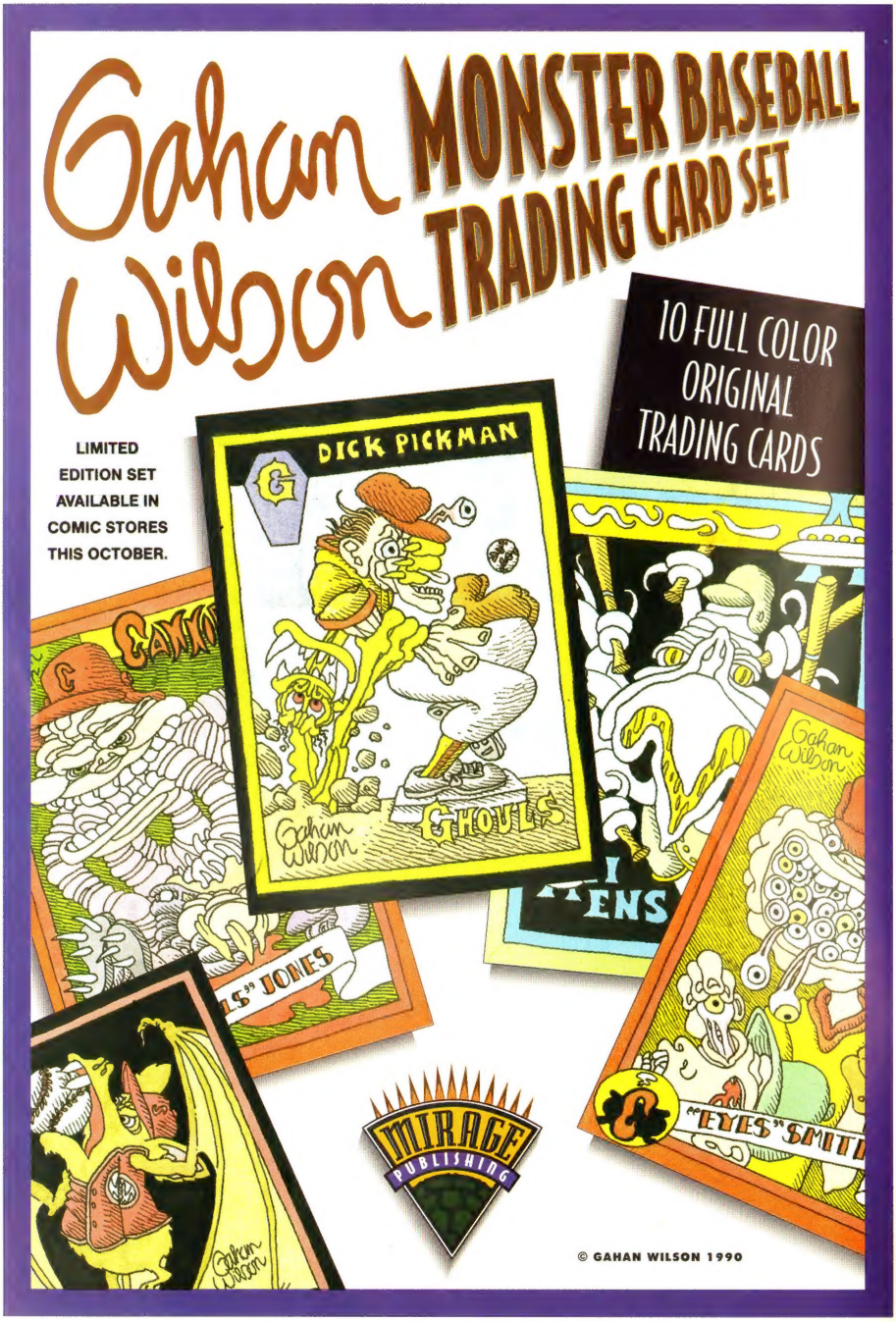
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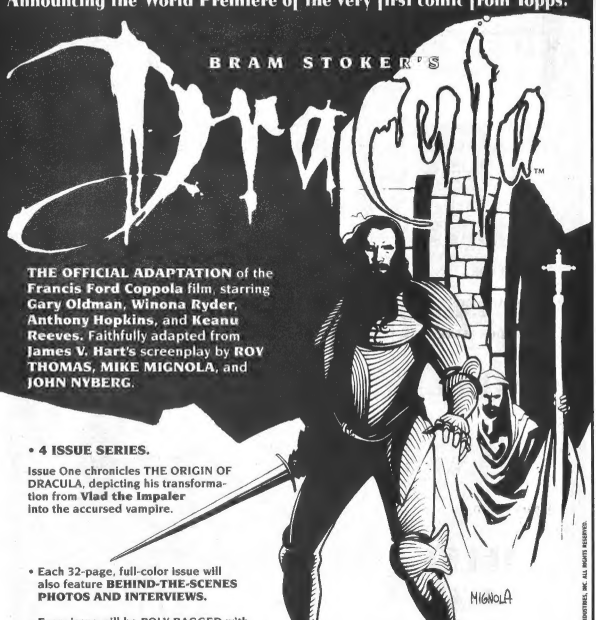

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cover coordinated by:
BRIAN STELFREEZE
painter par excellence

UP FRONT

WHAT IS WEALTH?

When I worked in the oil-rich Middle East for seven years, I believed an accumulation of money was wealth. But as time went on I saw how some spent this money, or hoarded it, or allowed it to change their lives a lot or not at all. I saw for myself that big bank balances did not equal happiness. All in all, I found it unpleasant to observe.

I came to a conclusion: Freedom is wealth.

Money can buy a certain amount of freedom, it's true. But among the most free of all are the "free"-lance creative people. The freedom to get up when you want, work when you want, play when you want, go on vacation as you choose. Answer the phone, not answer the phone. Work all night, or all day, or sleep all day and all night if you like. Be your own boss, answer only to the people you choose to collaborate with. Live in a skyscraper, or in the woods in a cabin. Travel the world, sending your work in as you go.

So many have that ability in this field and, whether they know it or not, are truly among the wealthiest people I have ever met. In terms of life-style, riches in the form of freedom, I have met more millionnaires in the comics field than all the Sheikhs I know and love in Arabia.

— J.R. Mather
International
Marketing Director

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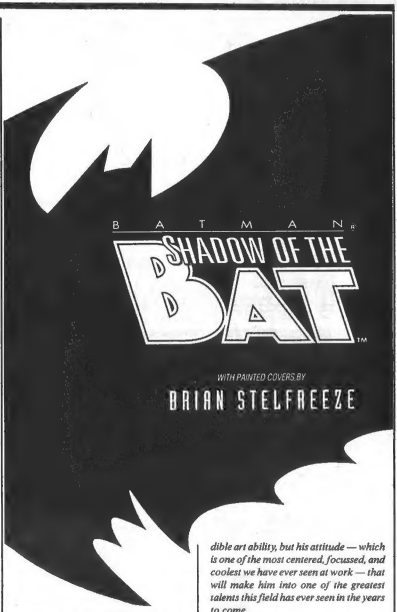
"I'm painting the covers to the first twelve



Brian Stelfreeze has to be the coolest person on the planet. And our definition of cool is someone who never, ever gets in a flap. Nothing fazes him. He takes a moment to always look on the good side, and that makes him someone people like working and collaborating with, someone they just like being around. If informed that the artwork can only be done in black and red, or the budget dictates such and such, he will look at that as an opportunity to express himself to the fullest within that limitation, and still find time to enjoy the challenge.

There is a brilliance about Brian Stelfreeze. It's not only the man's incredible art ability, but his attitude — which is one of the most centered, focussed, and coolest we have ever seen at work — that will make him into one of the greatest talents this field has ever seen in the years to come.

His feeling that no fan is too insignificant to talk to, that other folks' efforts are as important to them as his own are to him, his ultimate love of art and ideas, and his very sincere wish that all people should reach their peak and then surpass it, makes Brian a very special person.

Perhaps he owes it to the subliminal influence of his father. Brian once told us that, no matter what he drew, or how well he drew it, his father would always say, "Well, that's really good, son, but I think you can do just a little bit better." Brian said it affected him in the most profound way to always try to surpass himself, and he passes that torch of enthusiasm along to all around him . . .

issues of DC's SHADOW OF THE BAT."

BRIAN STELFREEZE

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Brian Stelfreeze
Born: In the '60s, in South Carolina — Myrtle Beach
Occupation: Illustrator
Credits: I started off with CYCOPS for Comics Interview Group; from there went into doing lots of covers for TSR comics and lots of Marvel magazines; did first MARVEL ILLUSTRATED SWIMSUIT ISSUE; did some cover paintings for TSR with ASSASSIN 13. For interior art I did *some* pages on a Hulk story in MARVEL TALES, two EXCALIBUR SPECIALs, an X-MEN ANNUAL, some various WHO'S WHO entries, and cover paintings for GREEN LANTERN SPECIALs, GREEN LANTERN: MOSAIC #1; TALES OF THE DEMON for Warner and for the comic book; same with CAT-WOMAN: HER SISTER'S KEEPER, just finished up CAT-WOMAN and PENGUIN graphic novel covers; and DOC SAVAGE for Millennium . . . oh, and I did some stuff for Campiti at Innovation.
Influences: I'm mostly influenced by dead guys like J.C. Leyendecker, Dean Cornwell, Norman Rockwell, and there's a little bit of Maxfield Parrish that sneaks in once in awhile — and old romance-novel and detective-novel cover artists.
Favorite Sports: Gymnastics and Hacky Sack
Favorite Movies: Anything that Ridley Scott has decided to touch; THE HUNGER; THE BIG BLUE by Luc Besson; LA FEMME NIKITA; there's a ton of stupid movies that I really enjoy, HUDSON HAWK is probably my favorite stupid movie; also I'm a big fan of the mid-'40s *film noir* classics, and anything that Alfred Hitchcock decided to do.
Favorite Music: Anything from The Machine — I like music that hasn't been touched by human hands like Kraftwerk and just digital stuff, Art of Noise, anything that's super digital, anything that's been played by buttons instead of by actual instruments. I'm a big fan of classical music and a big fan of techno-pop music, mostly because I think both ends of the scale are what I would consider perfect music — music that doesn't have like a lot of *things* happening, a lot of improv, just mostly music that's been laid down to be digitally perfect. That's one of the reasons why I like the classic stuff, because it's all pretty much "digitally mastered"; the classic musicians and the classic composers would really sit down for a long time and figure out *exactly* what made the music work. I think a lot of the rock-and-roll stuff is just going to fade out some day, is just too loose-ended, too much fun and not enough sweat and music. Jazz is out of here — unless the guys are closing their eyes, then I really appreciate jazz — I can listen to jazz and tell you if the guys are peeking or not.

"My COMICS REVUE cover . . . that *look* — once

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *So, you're painting the covers for how many issues of SHADOW OF THE BAT?*

BRIAN STELFREEZE: I'm painting the first twelve issues, the covers to the first twelve issues of SHADOW OF THE BAT.

DAK: *And will they all connect together to form one scene?*

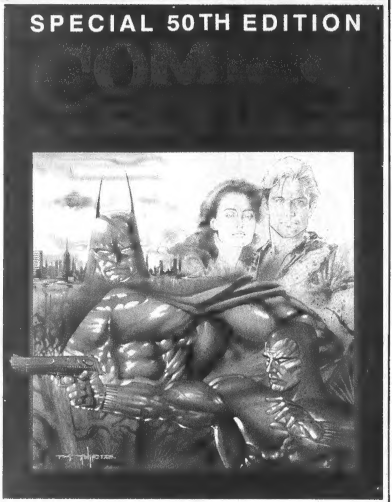
BRIAN: *(Laughter.)* No, I'm really happy to say that they won't — they won't *all* connect together. The stories work in story arcs — the first story works in a four-issue story arc, the second story is just one issue, and the third one I don't know how long that is — so what we're doing is we're figuring out a theme on each of the arcs themselves. On the first story arc, the theme is basically Batman breaking free. He gets captured on the first cover; on the second cover he's chained; on the third cover he's straining against his restraints; and on the fourth cover he actually breaks free —that's the theme that goes through the first arc. And the second arc, since there's only one cover, there's just one cover that tells the story. Yet we're going to try to keep the theme going throughout my entire run, sort of somehow connecting all of the arcs together.

DAK: *Is this being determined ahead of the stories so that the covers fit the stories? It's sort of unusual to have involved the cover artist with story arcs and thines.*

BRIAN: Well, I pretty much insist on having the scripts so that I can figure out what's going on in the insides of the books and have that determine how the covers are going to run. A lot of decisions have to be made based on the story, so I'm not just goofing around having a good time with the covers — I'm trying to help out what the guys are doing on the inside as much as possible, or at least tell a little bit of what happens on the inside.

DAK: *How did all this come about? How did you end up doing BATMAN covers?*

BRIAN: There's a long story that leads up to it, but basically **Denny O'Neil** saw my stuff on the COMICS REVUE #50 cover and liked my treatment of Batman. He gave me a call early one morning and asked me to do a cover for TALES OF THE DEMON. It was really fun working with him, and he liked working with me on that, so he asked me to do covers for another story, which was CATWOMAN: HER SISTER'S KEEPER, and then I was contracted again to do a Warner Books edition cover painting for



The cover that started it all — batwise.

TALES OF THE DEMON — and the same thing with CATWOMAN. Since we had worked together so many times, I guess he just got *comfortable* and asked me to do the covers for the brand-new BATMAN series.

DAK: *Go on and tell the whole story — I think people will get a kick out of it.* (Laughter.) *I know I did.*

BRIAN: It started off when I was doing an ad for a friend of mine, that was going to be in the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, and he asked me to include Batman. I thought, "Okay, this is going to be a lot of fun," and I did this drawing of Batman — and this was back during the late '80s, like '89. After I did the drawing he had to get it approved by DC before he could use the art in any ad, and it was a really sort of *brooding* picture of Batman sort of hanging off of a logo. When he sent it in to the licensing lawyer at DC, the guy sent it back with a lot of changes that had to be made on the drawing.

The changes basically were requiring me to *redo* the drawing!

There were things like Batman's ears being too long — and uneven! Batman was just way too damn *big*, his face was too mean and too angry and too angular, and his eyes were too small — the list just went on and on and on. Also, one of the major things was Batman could *not* come in contact with any other character from any other company, and he could not come in contact physically with any logo except for a DC Comics logo. What we decided was that there were just too many changes to salvage the drawing, so the friend used a **Mike Zeck** drawing on the ad instead; that worked out for him and he kept my original illustration.

About a year or so later, I was just kind of hanging out — and you called me to do —

disapproved by DC — is now the look they *want!*"

DAK: *Did I, or did Julia?*

BRIAN: One of you called me up to do a cover painting for COMICS REVUE #50, and I asked what was inside of COMICS REVUE and exactly what I had to do, and was told that I could do basically *anything*. And Batman was one of the characters! And then I found out that DC wouldn't have the final approval — that I could pretty much do anything I wanted and the lawyers at DC wouldn't see the book until it came out on the stands — so I said, "Well, *this* would be real neat!" And I pulled out the list of things the DC licensing guy said was *wrong* with the way I handled Batman; I pretty much made sure that I sort of did a caricature of all of the things that he said was wrong.

I made his ears *extra* long and *extra* uneven. *(Laughter.)* I made him *extra* angry and brooding. And I said, "He's going to be the *widest* Batman that anyone has ever seen!" I made him *really* thick. And also I made him come in contact physically with Flash Gordon and Dale Arden and also with the Phantom. *(Laughter.)* So it was kind of my way of throwing the thumb at these guys. It worked out real neat and I had a good time doing the illustration. In fact, I gave that cover illustration to the guy who asked me to do the illustration for his ad originally, and we got a big laugh out of it.

And the funny thing is, you know, here it is a couple of years later and that *look* — which was at one time totally disapproved by DC — is now the look that they *want* for Batman, the look that they *want* me to approach the covers with! It's kind of funny that it's come full circle. It really seems at DC the head sometimes doesn't really talk to the tail much. *(Laughter.)* Denny saw that cover for COMICS REVUE and gave me a call.

DAK: *Is there any possibility of you drawing Batman actually* inside *a comic —?*

BRIAN: I'm going to be staying out of doing BATMAN interior stuff for awhile. **Denny O'Neil** and I have talked about doing possibly a LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT or something. Denny doesn't write a lot of stories now, but I liked the old pulp style of writing that he used — I mean, he used more adjectives than anybody else in the industry, and I *like* that style of writing. I'd like to do a BATMAN story that sort of brought back that style of writing, and I talked to Denny about it and *he* wants to do it, so possibly some time in the future we'll get together.

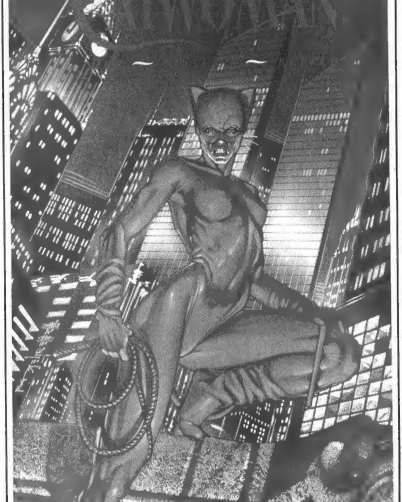
DAK: *Whatever happened with THIS YEAR'S GIRL? Is it coming out one of these days?*

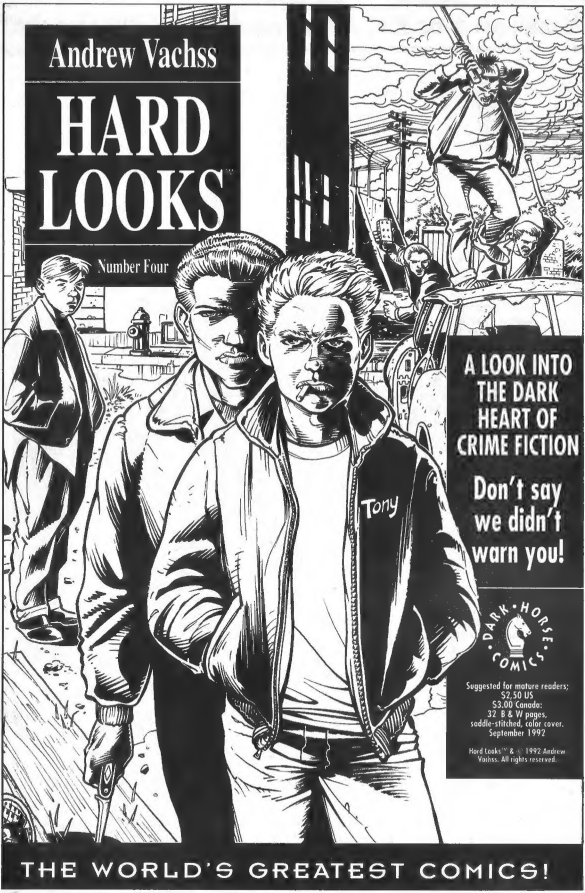
BRIAN: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Actually, what happened to THIS YEAR'S GIRL was *I* happened to it. After I did the first CYCOPS mini-series for you guys and the book came out, I was still doing a lot of commercial work in Atlanta; when I originally did CYCOPS my plan was to just kind of *do* this one book, have a little bit of fun, maybe, and *never* do comics again. But I actually had a *really* good time doing CYCOPS and I thought, "Well, gee, I'd love to do this again because it's just so much damn fun."

When I was approached by **Mark Nevello**, the former editor of Piranha Press, he showed me a script which was originally written for a play. I really enjoyed it; it was just really funny — one of the better scripts I had received. I went through it and said I'd like to do this, and he said, "What format?"

Since I had pencilled a book, I thought, "Well, why don't I be just *super* ambitious and do a fully-painted book!" I approached it as a fully-painted book. And what eventually happened was, well, comics just doesn't pay as much as the commercial work did, so I would have to work on the comic for a couple of days and then jump into working com-

One of the covers that came of it — catwise.

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"I take a cinematic approach to doing pencils."

mercial work in order to *pay* for the time that I spent on doing the comics, and that kind of burnt me out. So, I found myself sort of cutting back on the quality of the work that I was doing, and I really didn't want to finish the story and have the quality not be what I want it to be, so I decided to pull out of the project and go back to it when I was actually able to take some time on it.

Right now, the editor on the book, which is **Andy Helfer,** has said he understands my position. So, I really plan on going back to it, but it's probably going to be a little bit of time. There're a couple other projects I'm going to handle before that.

DAK: *Are you pretty well along?*

BRIAN: I'm at approximately the half-way point on THIS YEAR'S GIRL — I just need to do another issue-and-a-half and I'm finished with it.

DAK: *Well, a painted book is a whole lot of work.*

BRIAN: It's a *whole* lot of work. You know, I can do a cover in approximately three days — there are some times when I can wake up in the morning and have a cover finished before I go to sleep at night. But doing *panels* on a page in a fully-painted format is a whole different story! You have to really *think* about what you're doing, you have to think about the storytelling, you have to think about word balloons, and everything; it takes much longer to do fully-painted pages than it does to do a cover. And the funny thing is — you get paid more for a cover than you would if you did a page of fully-painted artwork! The pay ratio is something like 20% of what you'd get for a cover is what you get for a fully-painted page — and the work is like more than 200%! It's a lot easier to do a cover, you know, and get it over with, than it is to do a fully-painted page. But, you know, doing the page stuff is, I think, a lot more reward for the work, so you have to throw yourself into it every once in awhile.

DAK: *In the vital statistics you were saying that you had pencilled* parts *of books — since the original CYCOPS series which you fully pencilled — that you had only been pencilling* parts of various stories and things since then. Have you decided to sort of stay out of pencilling?

BRIAN: Pencilling pages, I like doing that, it's a lot of fun. When I go to conventions and I'm doing *all* these covers, people still come up to me and say, "But we like your pencil work, do some more pencils." There's so much of a reward doing the pencils, you have a continuous story there that runs over a *bunch* of illustrations — rather than just one. But my approach to doing pencils

actually requires me to work really hard. I try to take a cinematic approach to doing pencils; I try to really sit down and *plan* every panel out, and every person *in*

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"I did the last page of X-MEN ANNUAL in a day."

Above, below and opposite: art from X-MEN ANNUAL #1.

every panel, so that the storytelling is fairly dominant. That really causes me to take a lot of time on it.

Pencils usually take me maybe three or four days to do one page, and after I've worked at it for awhile I can get myself *down* to a page a day — but the funny thing is that usually by the time I get myself to do a page-a-day speed — I'm finished with the project! So I never actually get *up* to a page a day and *stay* there! I think I did the last page of the X-MEN ANNUAL in one day, and that was great, and that was the last page I had to do; at that point if I'd had maybe 15 more pages tossed on me I would have been able to just run through it, really fast. But it usually takes me awhile to get going, to get into the swing of doing pencils.

DAK: *You came out of commercial advertising?*

BRIAN: My background, it's funny, I took like *the* most confusing way into comics. Guys at conventions ask me, "How'd you get into comics?" I took the longest of the long roads in. I started off — my father was stationed in West Point, New York, and there was a comic-book shop in Highland Falls which is right outside of West Point, and I used to just raid this comic-book shop and pick up all these comics. That was during the time when I was real impressionable; I got heavily into **Gil Kane** and **Neal Adams** and all these guys, and I wanted

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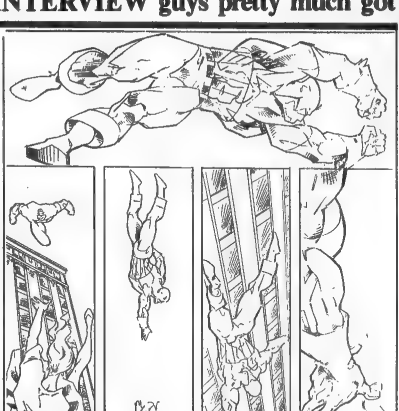
"You COMICS INTERVIEW guys pretty much got

to draw comics when I grew up. That was my only plan. And from there — my father was on tour there for about three years — we moved back to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and there was no comic-book shop in sight, you know, none that I could actually get to.

I could still do artwork that was comic-book related, but I lost touch with the industry, I lost touch with exactly what was going on. And eventually I made it all the way up to high school and got into doing work for a newspaper, basically editorial cartoon-type stuff, and just doing layouts and comps for the newspaper, and that introduced me to the commercial world. My artwork was still sort of "comic-bookie," but I was starting to apply it to different things, and from there I got a job airbrushing T-shirts on the beach, so I learned how to airbrush. And I figured out what I needed to do was go to the big city — Atlanta, Georgia — and really, you know, learn my craft. I went to an art school in Atlanta, stayed there for about a year, and decided art school *wasn't* the thing for me.

I got out, got a job at an illustration studio, worked there for a little over a year with a bunch of really talented guys, and that's where I think most of my *real* training came from. I worked with guys like **Bob Boyd, Mike Moore, Mark Burns,** and these guys are just *major* talents in the industry. It really helped to push me along. I was young at the time, and these guys knew more — I mean, most of them had been airbrushing and doing illustrations for longer than I had been *breathing* — so it was just a really big help for me.

And from there I went into doing architectural illustrations and a lot of signage designs, and I also got into doing fashion illustrations. Some friends of mine that lived up in New York came down to visit and saw some fashion illustrations of mine hanging on the walls and they said, "You should get into doing comics because this looks like comics stuff." I kind of thought, "No, this *doesn't* look like comics." My memory was based on the old **Gil Kane** and **Neal Adams** stuff. They said, "Well, there's a convention coming up in about a week or so, you should go there." I went to the Atlanta Fantasy Fair, I think it was the Atlanta Fantasy Fair of 1986 or 1987 and, you know, the *face* of comics had changed quite a bit! I thought, "This is neat, this is some stuff that I'd like to get into doing." I spent a couple months really tightening up my comic-book style and when I approached you COMICS INTERVIEW guys at a convention the very next year, that pretty much got me into comics.



Stellfreeze pencil samples that landed him CYCOPS.

JULIA R. MATHER: *I remember Brian came with the Captain America pencil page samples — remember that?*

DAK: *I can't forget it!* (Laughter.) *You were heralded in advance by Ted Boonthanakit. But didn't you approach the big guys and they told you things like, "You'll never work for us."*

BRIAN: Well, after I had started working for you guys, doing some CYCOPS pages, I was really having a good time, and some friends of mine showed up at one of the conventions that I was at, and they asked if they could show my Captain America pages to the Marvel editors. I figured if they showed my work to the Marvel editors, you know, then everything would just really get going for me. So they showed my art to the CAPTAIN AMERICA editor at the time — I don't remember the guy's name — and he looked at the pages and said, "Well, this kid can tell a story but he really can't draw all that well." And then he made a couple of other really harsh comments about, you know, the fact that my anatomy was way off and I don't know how to draw women. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Which is, of course, why they don't let you do, say, any sexy MARVEL*

Captain America TM & ©1982 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

me into comics. After CYCOPS I got a bunch of offers."

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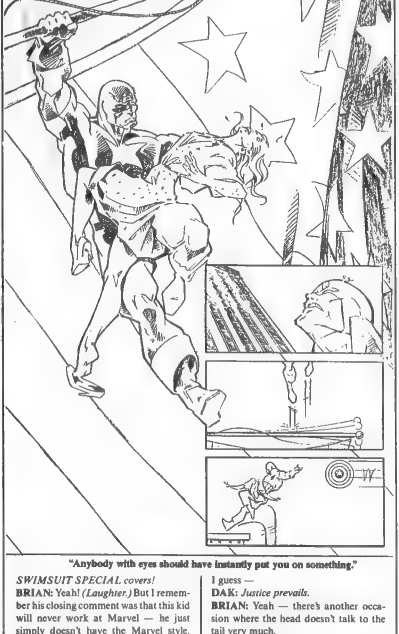


"Anybody with eyes should have instantly put you on something."

SWIMSUIT SPECIAL covers!

BRIAN: Yeah! *(Laughter.)* But I remember his closing comment was that this kid will never work at Marvel — he just simply doesn't have the Marvel style. From that point on, after he said that, I thought, "Well, he's an editor at Marvel; his word must be gold." So I never approached them for anything. I just decided, if I'm going to do anything, I'd best do it at DC rather than trying Marvel. Years later at the Chicago Comics Convention I met **Bobbie Chase** and **Bob Harras** and they said, "Oh, the guy was an asshole; he didn't know what he was talking about." *(Laughter.)* Both of them have given me jobs at Marvel, so I guess —

DAK: *Justice prevails.*

BRIAN: Yeah — there's another occasion where the head doesn't talk to the tail very much.

DAK: *Well, having been there, I can tell you that at the larger comics companies it's a lot of different people with different points of view.*

BRIAN: Yeah.

DAK: *But anybody with eyes should have just looked at those Cap pages and instantly put you on something. Ted knew.*

BRIAN: Yeah, **Ted Boonthanakit** knew it, Ted was onto it.

DAK: *So, for your first comics work, you did CYCOPS for us.*

BRIAN: Yeah.

DAK: *And after that your career just kind of took off. I remember we went to the San Diego Convention and you did some paintings, some big stand-up paintings — the first one was five feet tall or something.*

BRIAN: Yeah.

DAK: *And you got a lot of attention at that convention.*

BRIAN: From that convention there was just — it's really odd, people say that my career just took off, and I really don't think it did that. After I finished CYCOPS I got a whole bunch of offers, most of which I turned down because, you know, really comics didn't pay *that* well and commercial work paid *really* well. And at the same time there was a lot of things going on at the home front. I was closing up a marriage and just sort of moving around and a lot of different things, so I actually in a sense pulled *out* of comics for a short period. And I got more and more serious about the architectural work that I was doing, but the more and more serious I got with the architectural stuff, the more and more *bored* I got with it.

So, that all came to a head and I remember I called you up, Julia, and said, "Hey, this is it, I'm totally out of commercial work, I'm not going to do commercial work anymore, I'm going to concentrate on comics." And I pretty much did that, you know. From that point on I said I wasn't going to do any more commercial work, I was going to commit to some comic-book projects.

That's when I accepted THIS YEAR'S GIRL and worked on that for a period of time. And then I was starting to do cover paintings for TSR, during the time you were a consultant there, DAK. And the thing that really got the ball rolling for me — well, the *first* thing was CYCOPS; that put my name out there — but I think the thing that sold me as a cover artist was when I started doing things for Marvel. The MARVEL SWIMSUIT ISSUE cover was the first "big" cover I did, and that got me a lot of other commissions.

JULIA: *So, you got the MARVEL SWIMSUIT ISSUE — but you don't know how to draw women.* (Laughter.)

BRIAN: Yeah, I don't know how to draw women. And late at night I lay awake hoping that the guys at Marvel don't figure out that I can't draw women. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Whether it's your covers or your*

"I wasn't really planning on Ragoczy being 9

Original art courtesy private collection of DAK. ©1982

insides — do you work from models, work from photo reference, or just sort of pull it out of your head?

BRIAN: Depending on what I'm doing, somewhere in the neighborhood of 70% to 80% of it is pulled out of my head, but the 20% to 30% that I can't pull out of my head I get reference on. I try my best not to ever make anything up — because usually that's when the really big mistakes show up, is when you sort of start to make things up. And a lot of times I'll use models. I'll use my girlfriend or I'll find a photo in PLAYBOY, you know, or POPULAR MECHANICS, or whatever. So, a lot of it is indeed referenced, but I try to *see* if I can pull it out of my head.

DAK: *When you do the original paintings for display — like the awesome Ragoczy nine-foot stand-up, which is sensational, how do you do that? You're working in sections, right?*

BRIAN: Yeah. Something like that, it's real confusing. The ones that I started off doing, the ones for CYCOPS that showed up at a lot of the conventions, were pretty much just getting a large piece of illustration board and standing as far back away from it as possible while still being able to reach it, and just doing the drawing. I did a small drawing of the original CYCOPS stand-up — just a sketch — and I took it down to my friendly neighborhood Xerox machine and I kept on blowing it up and blowing it up until I got it to the actual size.

DAK: *In pieces?*

BRIAN: Yeah, in pieces! And it was kind of funny, because I was hanging out at Office Depot, I had like a large section of the floor, taping these pieces of Xerox paper together. *(Laughter.)* Trying to form this one big illustration. I took that and transferred it with lead sheet over onto the illustration board and then kind of backed away from it and put in the details.

With the monster Ragoczy painting it was a little bit easier, because I had some friends who worked at a sign company doing architectural drawings, so I did a smaller drawing and took that to the sign company and had it projected onto a wall; it was projected in sections, and I just basically took a roll of sign-painter's canvas and started with his feet, rolled out some more canvas and kept on going until I finished with his head. And that was kind of funny because I wasn't really planning on Ragoczy being *nine feet*, I was actually planning on him being maybe six feet — but I got the proportions wrong. *(Laughter.)* I could only

feet. I thought, 'This is *huge!*'"

X-THIEVES TM & ©1988 Vogel, Propst, Kraft.

see his feet and you can't gauge the whole body from that, but I kind of looked at his feet and said, "Ah, it looks like it's going to be about six or seven feet." It was a lot of fun working on that.

DAK: *And then did you paint it with acrylic?*

BRIAN: Yeah. I painted it with mostly airbrush and a little bit of acrylics added in, and sort of scribing some colored pencils on there really harshly to give it a graphic feel.

DAK: *And you painted the sections separately, or did you put the canvases together and then paint them?*

BRIAN: I put the whole thing together and painted it as one big piece.

DAK: *I wondered about that, how you matched colors and everything.*

BRIAN: Yeah, it would be *impossible* to match the colors — you have to do it as one big piece. In fact, I laid it down on the living-room floor and worked on it, and this is when I first realized that it was actually nine feet! I started to stand it up so that I could work on the details and the ceiling was only seven and a half feet. *(Laughter.)* His head started scraping and I thought, "Oh, my God, this is really *huge!*" So I took it out on the back deck and stood Ragoczy up there; that's the only place I could work on it. It was funny because I took it out there at about two o'clock and the kids were getting off from school and it scared the hell out of a lot of them — little kids coming around the corner and seeing this nine-foot guy with a gun. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Had you ever done anything like that before?*

BRIAN: Not exactly like that. I've done some murals and things like that working for friends of mine, but never anything exactly like that, not anything on canvas that would be portable.

DAK: *Yeah, it's pretty amazing. When I saw you standing beside it for scale —* (Laughter.) *Well, I've noticed when you're at a convention, say that first San Diego Con we all attended together before you were BRIAN STELFREEZE, when you were just brian stelfreeze — you still had more people around your table than almost anybody at that whole artist's row. Why do you think that is? Is it the technique? Is it your personality?*

BRIAN: I'm not exactly sure. I think the first conventions that I started going to after CYCOPS — I mean, it really *hit* me the first time someone brought a portfolio up to me and said, "Brian, could you look at my work and tell me what I need to do?" I looked in the guy's face and I kind of thought, "Man, you're

Here: Original X-THIEVES & CYCOPS art stand-ups. Opposite: 9-foot Ragoczy!

CYCOPS TM & ©1988 Woodcock, Stelfreeze, Kraft.

"Gaijin Studios: me, Adam Hughes, Tony Harris,

taking really big advantage of a great situation you've got here." I mean, back when I was 12, 13, 14 years old and I was getting really serious into comics I didn't really have that opportunity — or I didn't take advantage of that opportunity, to be able to go to a convention and get a professional to say something about my work that might help me out. I really believe that if I *had* done that, or if I had that opportunity, we'd probably be having this conversation a couple of years ago

And here's a convention where a *lot* of guys can go and talk to the people who are actually doing the work; I mean, if you're interested in the work you can talk to the creators; if you're interested in actually improving your own portfolio you can talk to the creators. And it hit me sitting there side-by-side with **Ted Boonthanakit** at that first big convention that these people, you know, they're just really taking advantage of something, and the convention was a great thing. It was just a really nifty thing to be able to see the people doing the drawings, see the people creating the books. So, I just got

really excited about the fact that I was doing this.

You know, the fact that here's some people coming to see not necessarily *me* but the creators of comics, it got me kind of jazzed and I was just really excited about talking to these people, telling them what I'm doing, telling them what friends of mine are doing, and just telling them everything about the comics industry. I believe a lot of that comes across — the fact that I'm really excited about *being* there and I'm really excited about *talking* to people.

JULIA: *I think it was Don Hillsman who said that he went down to see you guys at Gaijin Studios and that you're all very playfully competitive. Who can come up with the next greatest thing, who can just beat the other person creatively, who can think of something more! He said you guys are just so* juiced *creatively!*

BRIAN: Yeah.

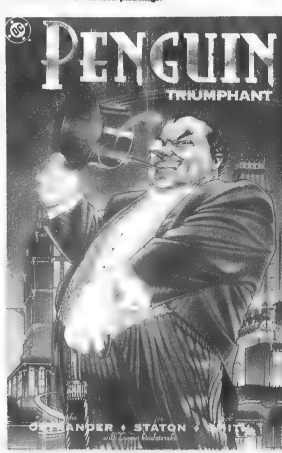
JULIA: *And in that kind of competitive environment, you know, tremendous creative stuff comes forth. Do you think that's true? How did you get that kind of camaraderie at Gaijin? And who's working with you there?*

BRIAN: Well, Gaijin Studios is composed of myself, **Adam Hughes, Tony Harris, Joe Phillips, Cully Hamner** and **Jason Pearson.**

DAK: *Cully's with you now?*

BRIAN: Yeah.

Here and facing page: Steelfreeze pencil sketches and finished paintings.



Penguin TM & ©1992 DC Comics, Inc.

Joe Phillips, Cully Hamner and Jason Pearson."

DAK: *That's great to hear! You know, for years he sent samples here, and I met him at conventions and he was always so close to making it.*

BRIAN: He finally stepped over the line! *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *It probably was really frustrating but I would say, "You're almost there."* (Laughter.) *The main thing was he stuck with it — that's great.*

BRIAN: I love the fact that he's at the studio now because he's another one of the "graphic guys" in comics. There's, like, two main schools in comics: the organic guys and the guys who are the machinists. And I'm considered one of the machinists because, you know, of my graphic approach to doing drawings. I guess people such as **Walt Simonson** or **Bill Sienkiewicz** or **Cully Hamner** or even **Larry Stroman** are considered machinists

DAK: *There's another guy that I think is wonderful, Larry Stroman.*

BRIAN: Yeah, he's really frighteningly good. And I like the fact that, you know, there are a lot of guys who have that approach, who have that really strong hard-edge approach. Cully is one of the guys who — although he's just starting out now — he's getting a real tight grasp of his graphics. I think in a couple of years we're going to be seeing some amazing design work from Cully.

DAK: *The only criticism I have for Cully is — backgrounds!* (Laughter.)

BRIAN: Don't worry, I'll force him to do them.

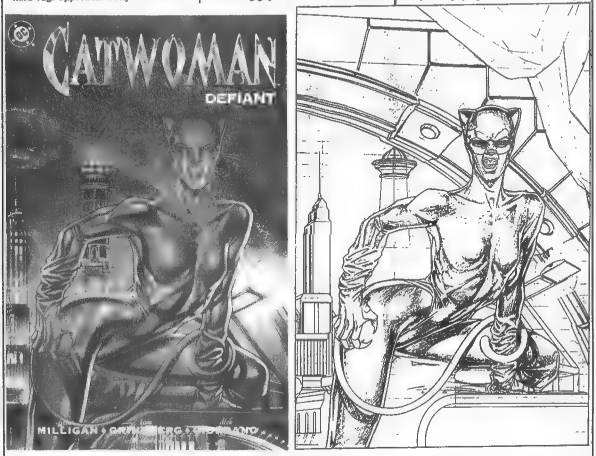
DAK: *So, what about this Image thing? That's a different studio — with different guys.*

BRIAN: The Image Comics thing, it kind of slowly crept up on me. I got to know **Jim Lee** a couple of years back and I went up and paid a visit to his studio —

DAK: *Homage, right?*

BRIAN: Yeah, Homage Studios — in fact, Homage Studios is still there, *separate* from Image. I personally really get a big kick out of the fact that these guys have sort of run out and, you know, formed their own company; it's really odd in that these are *big name* guys doing it. I got *into* the industry doing comics for the independents; people usually think of independents as a starting point, and when you grow up you get to work for the big guys. Now here's a bunch of illustrators who have sort of defected away from the big guys and started doing comics for the independents. I think it's neat because the "Big Guys" really need to be shaken up some, you know. I think what Image is doing is a little bit of that, it's shaking them up and making them a little bit nervous, and *probably* making them pay attention to the individual artists a little bit more.

That's one of the reasons why I appreciate what they're doing. And it *also* has a potential of pulling some of the comics fans *into* the independents — I mean the guys who walk into the comics store every Thursday and just pick up major comics and couldn't care less what the comic's about, couldn't care less what's in it, couldn't care less who drew it, they're just picking them up — and, you know, they're *hating* the comics that they're buying, but they never bleed off into the independents. There's a lot of independent companies producing some great material, and I think maybe if these Image guys can start pulling some of the people *away* from the big three or the big two *into* some of the independents and they start paying attention to the things



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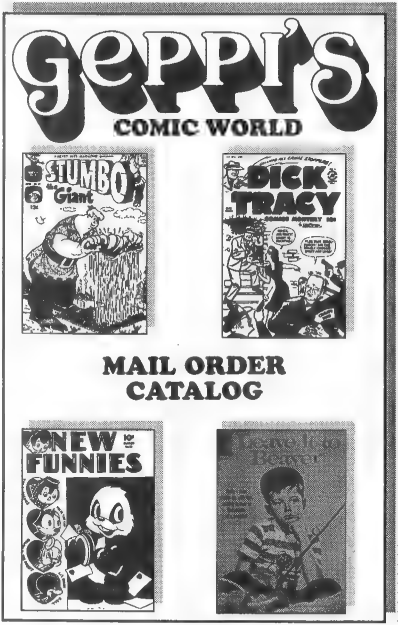

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"Some art's really good in the independents."

the independent companies are doing, even if they just pick up the books and flip through them, maybe they might find out that some of the artwork is really good in the independents.

Like **Mark Schultz's** XENOZOIC TALES; I really think some of the X-MEN fans need to start checking that out. Some of these Marvel zombies and DC zombies need to start *looking* at some of this work. **Dave Stevens'** ROCKETEER. There're so many great things out there, but there's no bridge to get to them; the fans are stuck on the big company island and they refuse to cross over and look at some of the independents. I think the Image guys might be able to pull some of them over.

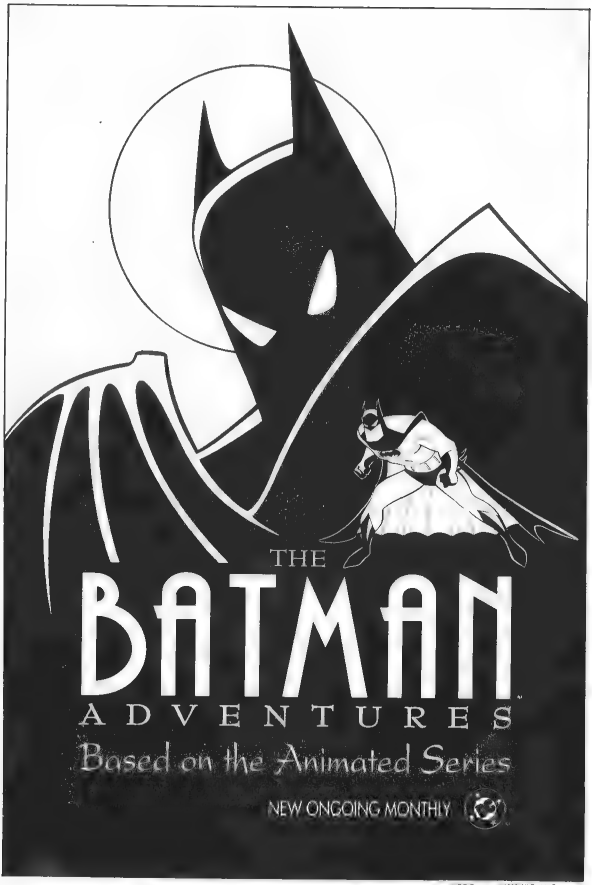
And there's also something really nice about the fact that these guys are big names, these guys are big business, and they are deciding to take a walk while they're big, while they're at the heights of their careers.

Almost a hundred years ago there was a group of artists that belonged to the Society of American Artists and they — the Society of American artists — did a lot of things and eventually became a little bit stagnant, because the Society of American Artists pretty much did the same thing over and over again in their shows. They sort of wanted the artists to stay within a certain realm and wanted the artists to do certain things and not get *wild*, not go crazy or anything like that. But there was a group of ten illustrators that decided to break away from the Society of American Artists, and this group is always referred to as The Ten. The Ten broke away because they felt that they could do more dynamic things, they could push the realm of impressionistic work further than the Society of American Artists was allowing them to do. So they broke away and for a long period of time The Ten created the *look* of American impressionistic art. It's really cool that a small group like that was able to make such a difference in people's perceptions of what a field should be.

And I think it's really neat that almost a hundred years later a similar event happens in the comic-book industry, where a small group of people breaks away from the big thing, sort of striking out on their own. I mean, these guys, whether you like them or not, they have honestly changed the face of comics, they have brought in a west-coast style that, you know, a lot of the guys getting jobs at Marvel have to primarily duplicate in order to *get* those jobs. I mean, I'm not a

Savage — Doc and sister Pat — a la Stelfreeze. Barns beware!

Doc Savage TM & ® 1992 Conde Nast / Millennium.



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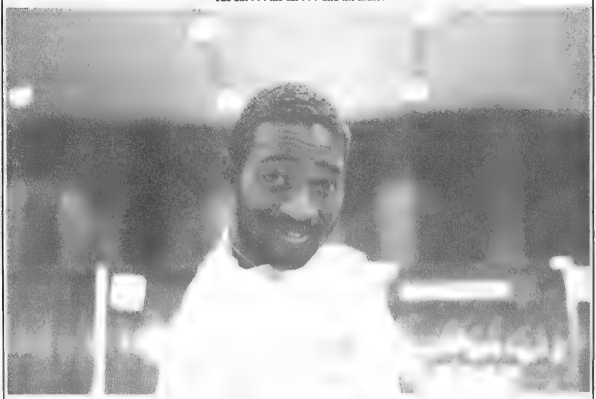
"This is a good time to *be* a comics fan."

big fan of some of the guys in the Image group, but I think that you have to appreciate what they're doing, you have to appreciate the fact that they are really putting their balls on the line to make a difference. And whether or not they're going to make a difference remains to be seen, but I think for comics fans it's a good time to *be* a comics fan. It's a really good time to be reading about all these things, and in a sense I think it's cool because I'm *seeing* what all those people were seeing a hundred years ago when The Ten broke away.

Everyone was kind of looking at them like, "Ah, you're crazy, you're going to *fail!*" The Image guys, they might fail, So far they haven't, so far they're doing pretty damn good, and so far they're kind of changing the face of comics — a little. I think over the next year or so they're going to change the face of comics a lot. They're already changed the face of what people view as independent publishing. And a lot of the older guys, **Frank Miller** and **Walt Simonson** and all these guys, *they're* doing independent

The bat . . . the cat . . . and the artist.



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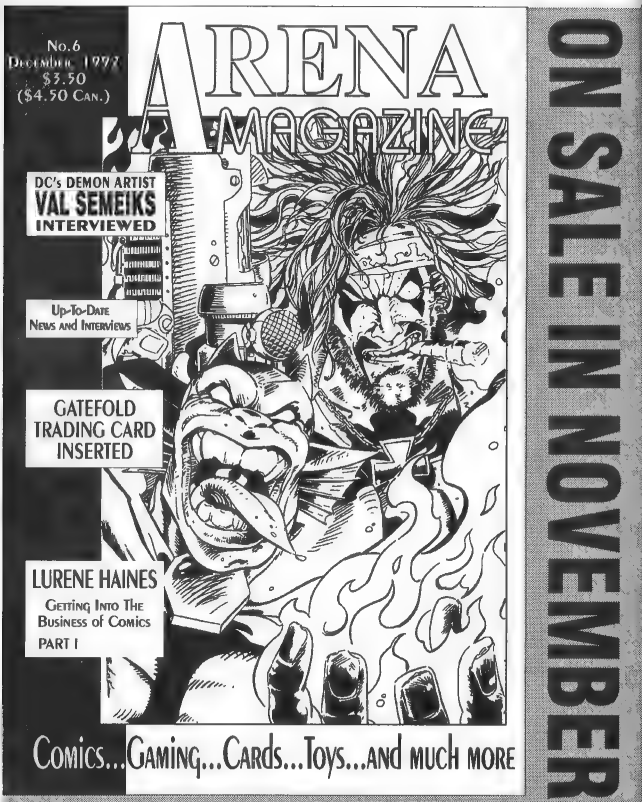
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"I look at the human form as a machine."

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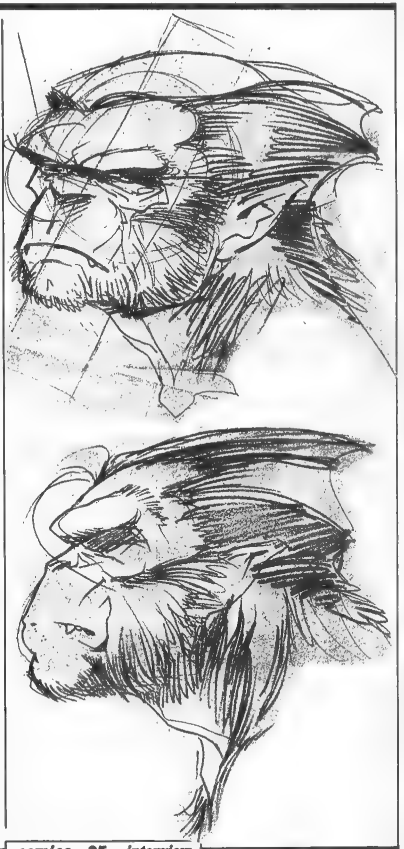
comics, too. It's really neat to see a lot of these big name guys who *were* exclusively with DC and Marvel now doing stuff for independent books, and a lot of the older fans actually buying Dark Horse books, actually buying some of the independent books. So I think maybe it should happen, and I think it's good that these guys who are the newest, most fashionable group are actually jumping into the independent pool. They're going to bring a lot of fans with them. There are going to be a lot of fans *wanting* to pick up a lot of independent books simply because of these guys.

I hear people putting them down — and yeah, they deserve a lot of it, because they're doing a lot of things not so nifty — but overall they're bringing their fans to the independents. And maybe if the independents would sharpen up, if the independents would put out a stronger product, maybe the independents would *keep* some of those people. So it's up to independent publishers to really sit back and say, "There's gonna be good fishing, I better start casting, I better start putting out some good product." For the most part, I look at independent publishing, and somewhere in the neighborhood of 60% of it is absolute crap, you know. It's just really bad stuff. But there's a lot of gems out there and when you find the gems it beats *anything* that the big companies are doing. And maybe Image will get more people to look around and LOVE AND ROCKETS will start selling more, maybe XENOZOIC TALES will start selling more. If these people decide to pick up *one* independent book they might decide to pick up *another* one.

DAK: *Getting back to your own work, Brian, you said there are the "organic" guys and the "machinists." Along with Simonson, Sienkiewicz, Stroman and others, you said you consider yourself a machinist — what did you mean by that?*

BRIAN: For a long time when I started, when I was trying to do drawings, I couldn't put it together. I mean, whether I was trying to draw the human form or *anything* — apples or oranges — I could not do it. I used to always watch PBS — and it wasn't until I saw a program on computers and vector graphics, where I sat back and really paid attention to it, and suddenly I was like, "Wait a minute — *yeah!*" You don't necessarily have to take such an organic approach to doing the human form. I mean, you don't have to necessarily round off all the edges, you can *do* things graphically. And when I looked at the human form not so much



"I figured this is what Frazetta's doing — and

as a, you now, a bag of water, but when I looked at it as a machine, that's when things started making sense to me. It was just so much *easier* for me to approach doing my drawings when I took a more mechanical approach to it.

When I think of the human form, I always think of it as a really well-designed robot, and I can sort of spin it and twist it and just do illustrations of it in any position, any form I want — if I think of it in terms of a machine first, and then add the skin on later. So, that's just pretty much the approach I take with doing everything — the human form, apples, oranges, cars, whatever. Whether it's a machine or not I try to *start* with it being a basic machine and building off of that.

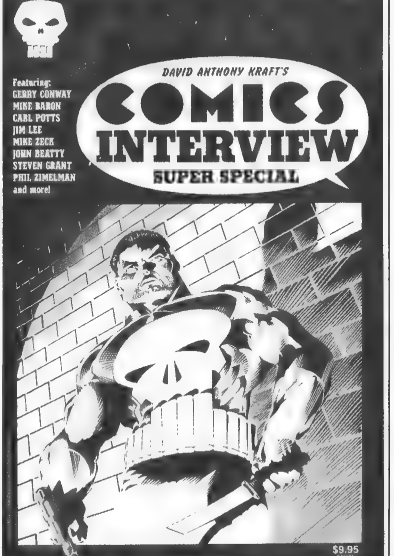
DAK: *Well, it makes for good-looking ladies!*

BRIAN: Yeah! *(Laughter.)* Oddly enough.

DAK: *I think you were talking to Julia about this — but you bought an early issue of COMICS INTERVIEW — what was it, #19 with the Brian Bolland interview?*

BRIAN: Yeah.

DAK: *And early into it the interviewer said something like, "Well, I don't know a lot about art so we'll not discuss that at all." And you thought, "Wait a minute, I want to know this stuff!"*



BRIAN: Yeah, the interviewer kind of made fun of art equipment and art stuff, and I didn't realize this until I was sitting in my living room reading this **Brian Bolland** interview. It's like, "I like **Brian Bolland,** I want to know exactly what type of brush he uses, I want to know what type of paper he likes, and I want to know everything about him, but I don't care what his first comic book was and I don't care where he was born and whatever." I wanted to know the nuts and bolts about what he did.

DAK: *Well, that's leading up to: Let's have some of those nuts and bolts. When you're painting what are some of the techniques and the equipment you use and the way you go about things?*

BRIAN: Well, the painting style that I use is not something new — I'm not going to sit back and say, "This is the new style that I invented, it's a late-breaking technique." It's actually a bastardization of a lot of different things I've seen. I'm a big fan of **Dean Cornwell** and **J.C. Leyendecker** and also **Frank Frazetta.** The approach I used, basically, was looking at their work and trying to figure out *how* they did what they did. The only thing that was available to me, or the only equipment that I knew about, was acrylics and colored inks, and after pushing it around for so long I figured out, "Ah, this is exactly what **Frank Frazetta** is doing, he's using acrylics and he's using colored inks, and he's using it *this* way!" I figured out a technique of using the acrylics and colored inks — and later I found out he wasn't doing that at all, he was using oils. *(Laughter.)* I was totally off the mark.

But the technique I use is sort of an imprimatur technique where I use the airbrush to lay down a basic tone, a basic localized color, and I use the acrylics to build on top of it. And I usually start with an ink wash. After I'm finished with my ink washing — which is usually in Painel's gray — I build on top of that with an airbrush overcoat of a single color, and that color is usually a brown or a blue, depending on whatever I'm illustrating. From there, I start building the colors up on top of it; the first few strokes of acrylic that I lay down are *very* close to my base tone, and I keep on working and working until I've got the full figure there. So, it's kind of a bizarre technique, you know, but . . .

DAK: *It sounds similar to Dave McKean's method.*

BRIAN: Yeah. What I do is similar to what **Bill Sienkiewicz** does, what **Dave McKean** does and, in not-so-odd a way,

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found out he wasn't doing that at all. *(Laughter.)"*

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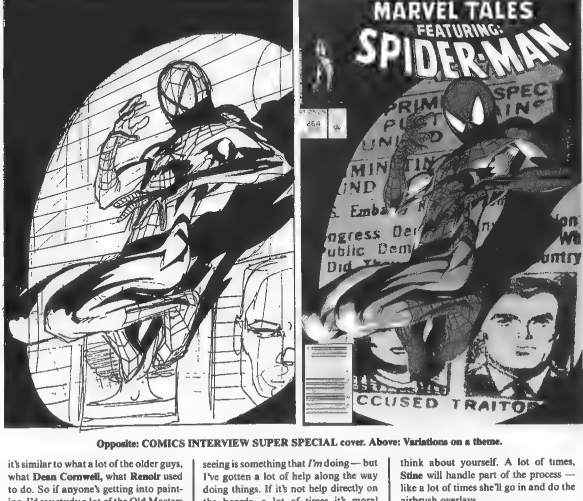

Opposite: COMICS INTERVIEW SUPER SPECIAL cover. Above: Variations on a theme.

it's similar to what a lot of the older guys, what **Dean Cornwell,** what **Renoir** used to do. So if anyone's getting into painting, I'd say study a lot of the Old Masters and take the equipment that you're using — and it doesn't really matter if it's the right equipment or not — but look at the Old Masters and try to figure out what they're doing. Even if you just have a bunch of colored pencils, you know, try to figure out what they're doing, and that'll build a technique for you.

DAK: *The Old Masters, Ed O'Neal told me — I'm certainly no expert on this — would often have assistants do a lot of it, but what they understood was how cloth draped, how light hit a subject, things like that. Some of the Old Masters had a lot of assistants and then they would come in and paint the cloth/folds and the light and the things like that —*

BRIAN: Yeah.

DAK: *— and that's what really made the painting. Do you do anything like that?*

BRIAN: Well, I don't work with assistants *per se;* with my work, generally when my work gets out there what you're seeing is something that *I'm* doing — but I've gotten a lot of help along the way doing things. If it's not help directly on the boards, a lot of times it's moral support. I think it's real important to stress that — especially when you consider that a lot of comics are done in almost an assembly-line process — that the *other* people really help out things.

People such as **Karl Story;** he's my inker of choice, and he's been an *incredibly* big help on just making my work look good. The pencils that you see aren't usually pencils, they're usually *inks.* A large percentage of those inks is **Story; Karl** does help out the look of the over-all piece.

A lot of times, when I do paintings, I'll get my girlfriend **Stine** to give me some back-up on things, and a lot of times that brings a new life into the piece — otherwise, an artist's work can get stagnant, just by doing the same thing over and over again. So, a lot of times it's real important to bring in other hitters to kind of just give the work a new life, give it some sort of a twist that you may not think about yourself. A lot of times, **Stine** will handle part of the process — like a lot of times she'll go in and do the airbrush overlays.

Other times, it's just simple things like cutting boards and ruling out borders and stuff like that, but it really helps out. I mean, if I'm not thinking about that type of stuff, I can concentrate on the work that I have to do — concentrate on the style, concentrate on the finished product.

But there are sometimes a lot of hands along the way. Gaijin Studios has a few assistants; there's one guy who comes in about once a week just to cut boards for us, so that we don't actually have to cut boards. I think it's important to give a mention to these guys that may not necessarily put paint on canvas, but they do help us out quite a bit.

I like the *simpler* parts of the illustration, just the drawing part — that's the part that I think really keys it for me. And the system of airbrushing that I use, the system of *everything* up to the final paint strokes — it doesn't take a genius to

"Purists need more vegetables in their diets."

do it. I mean, I use the airbrush, but what I do with the airbrush any trained monkey can do with the airbrush. I don't consider myself this "world-renowned airbrush artist." What I do with the airbrush I can do, and I have done it, with a can of spray paint; it's just kind of laying down basic colors, then going on top of it with the paint. I think the paint is what keys it, not really so much the airbrushing.

DAK: *You sometimes use pencils and things, too, right?*

BRIAN: Oh, yeah, I use everything. A lot of the purists — you know, people who only like using one medium — they *hate* me because I use everything. For a long period of time, I found that the best white you can use was actually Griffen's shoe polish. *(Laughter.)* That's the only white that I used — until Dr. Martin's came out with something a little bit better. If I thought oatmeal would give me a good texture, you know, I'd use it on a painting — it really doesn't matter to me.

DAK: *This is an interesting topic, because Julia has an artist friend who's now living in France —*

JULIA: *Brian Adams started doing airbrushing back in the early '70s when really, only a few Japanese people were using it. This friend of mine — nobody was really working with airbrushes, it was such a new thing — kind of slavishly learned how to use an airbrush to do absolutely* everything *with it, so to him an airbrush painting is* not *an airbrush painting if there's* anything *that isn't done with an airbrush. I had a huge argument with him over it. I said, "An airbrush is a brush; it's a brush that squirts air. You don't look at a painting and say, 'I did this whole painting with a #2 brush; I didn't use any other brush — I've done it all with a #2!'"* (Laughter.) *I think that an airbrush is a brush; it's just a tool.*

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: *If you're building a house, you would use a saw for one thing and a drill for another, and when you're doing fine lines you use a fine brush and for fat lines you use a fat one, and when you want graduated tones or something — you use an airbrush. But Brian Adams would not agree with me at all on that!*

BRIAN: I meet a lot of these people at conventions and some of them have snuck by the studio, but basically I think that some of the purists need to maybe get a little bit more vegetables in their diet. *(Laughter.)* I mean, it really doesn't *matter;* with me, my main thing is using the best tool for the job. Whatever that tool is, I couldn't care less. If I find that a colored pencil is going to work better than a brush — then I'll use a colored pencil! The most important thing — and it might sound like a Nazi or a Communist approach — the ends justify the means. The most important thing is getting a good piece. If doing something with another piece of equipment means you'll get a better piece, then so be it. I had a bunch of talks with art teachers about actually using a projector to blow up drawings, you know, onto my board — I use a projector and I'm damn happy I've got one, mainly because if I had to do a drawing and then *redo* that drawing again, larger, I'd lose some of the original *magic.* Even with a projector you lose some of the original magic of the drawing.

I mean, I'm not above using the Xerox machine to blow my drawings up or down — or bend things around — or blow up a character's head and shrink down background characters. Or use the projector. Use whatever tool you can use to create a better looking piece! Because, in the end, the fans who look at it are not going to say, "Well, this piece is better than this piece, because this guy *only* used paint on the end of a stick of spaghetti." *(Laughter.)* People couldn't care less; what's most important is the hard image that's finished, you know. So I use whatever is necessary.

DAK: *When you do your preliminary cover sketches, I've observed they're pretty one-dimensional — there's not a lot of depth to them.*

BRIAN: Yeah.

DAK: *While you may have the painting in your head, of course the editor looking*

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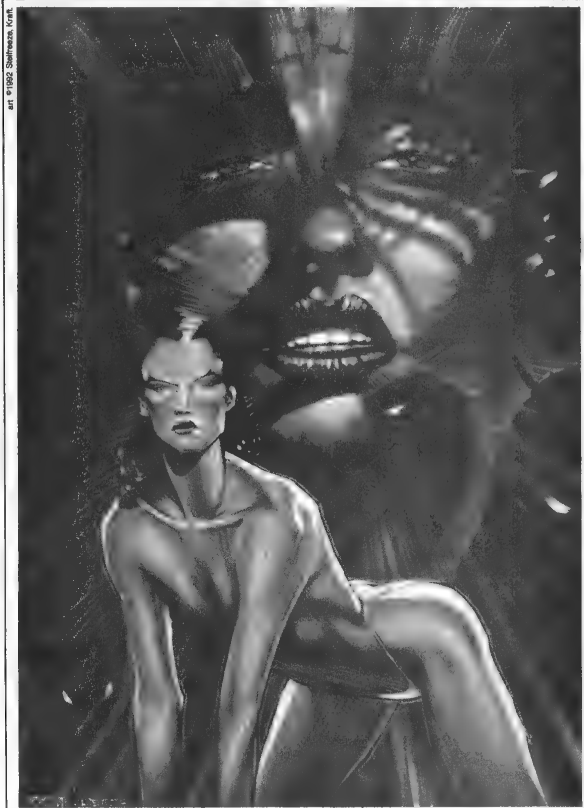
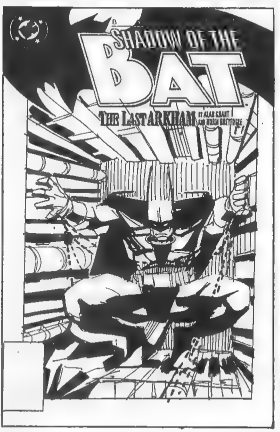
"What's most important is the finished image."



Opposite: panels from X-MEN ANNUAL #1. Above: one of three stunning cover paintings for unpublished CYCOPS mini-series.

"You're asking the editor to make a leap of



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This spread and next: Some cover sketches that required an editorial leap of faith.

at that sketch just sees this really flat thing. Do you run into any trouble?

BRIAN: I run into *tons* of trouble — I run into all the trouble in the world! When you're doing a painted cover, you can't turn in a painted concept; you have to turn in black-and-white line work, and really you're asking the editor to make a leap of faith. You're asking an editor for a hell of a lot, you know. Particularly with *my* covers, I think the biggest key to what I do is the colors I use, the textures, and when I turn in a sketch it doesn't have *any* of that — it doesn't have the colors, it doesn't have the textures, it doesn't have all the neat little highlights and stuff like that. So an editor has to look at just the bare, raw, naked design and hopefully he can kind of *estimate* what the cover's going to look like.

Alas, a lot of editors can't do that — and I don't really blame them. I mean, I look at a lot of the sketches that I turn in and I know *I* wouldn't ask me to do this cover, based on this. *(Laughter.)*

Hopefully, you know, I can fool a lot of these editors into *trusting* me just a little bit. Sometimes when I have a really odd design that I *know* an editor is not going to approve by looking at it — such as the MARVEL SWIMSUIT ISSUE cover I did, for which the design's just a girl standing there with a bunch of guys in back of her; and the She-Hulk doesn't *look* like She-Hulk until she's colored green — I'll do a full-color rendering of the piece so that the editor's able to see the colors I'm going to use, and some of the textures.

DAK: *The big question is — did she make you shave She-Hulk's legs?* (Laughter.)

BRIAN: Yeah, I had to shave her legs and change her lipstick. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *When you're sketching and that magic of the sketch is there, are you seeing the colors? Where do the colors enter in? When you're sketching a SHADOW OF THE BAT cover, for example, do you already have the colors in mind?*

BRIAN: It's really weird. When the ideas for cover designs come to me, they come to me in 100,000 different forms. A lot of times I'll sit down and say, "Okay, I'm going to do a cover for this book; blue, green and purple are the colors that I'm going to use." I'll have no idea what I'm going to do — but I'll know the colors that I'm going to use. There are a lot of times when I'll know the facial expressions, but I won't know what the rest of the body is going to be doing. So I just have to put it together; it's like a big puzzle. I put the puzzle together in my head most of the time, and I kind of push in different pieces. I can see the illustration in my head before I put it down on the illustration board.

A lot of times that's kind of a blessing, because I know *exactly* what I'm doing. If you ever see me work, it looks like I'm just kind of throwing paint at it and goofing around — but it's not that I'm throwing paint at it, it's just that I know where the paint is *supposed* to go because I can see the illustration in my head. It's just a question of putting it there, not figuring out what I need to do with it. And a lot of times that's bad — because, once I complete the puzzle in my head, I don't really feel I should go ahead and do it *again* on the actual illustration board. *(Laughter.)* So, I can really work on an illustration in my head and, once I get it put together, *that's* when you kind of see me jumping up and

faith. This is particularly true with *my* covers."

running around the studio going, "Yes, I've done it, I've done it!"

But when I do the actual illustration on the board, I'll just say I'm finished and put it in the Federal Express box and send it off; there's usually no big joy or release there. A lot of times the guys at the studio think, "Is Brian unhappy with that piece or something?" It's *not* that I'm unhappy with it, it's just that I know where it's supposed to go and I get to it and I'm finished with it.

Very seldom do things happen on the board I didn't plan on happening.

But every once in awhile I'll make a big mistake, like drop paint on something, and go, "Oh, damn, I've got to get out of *this* mess." And when I get out of that mess *then* I'll get excited and jump around. *(Laughter.)* But other than that, the big rejoice comes when I figure out *how* to do the illustration, much more so than when I actually *do* the illustration.

DAK: *Having come out of a commercial background, I suppose a lot of that stuff you learned as you went along. But what about when you pencilled comics for the first time? Inked comics? Karl Story . . . is he still with Gaijin?*

BRIAN: Yeah, he's sort of Gaijin Studios, Midwest, right now.

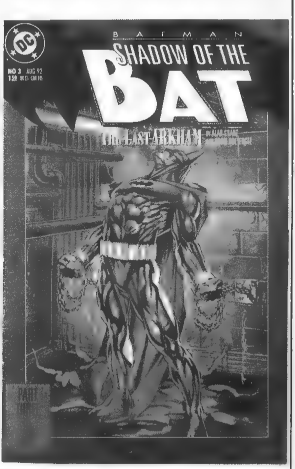
DAK: *I remember Mark Propst was drawing X-THIEVES for us, and came across Karl's work and just flipped over it; then you and Karl met and really hit it off and he inked CYCOPS, did a really neat job on it. I didn't know whether you actually could or couldn't ink, you know, in comic-book fashion, until you inked X-THIEVES #10, over Mark Propst's pencils, or had your pages "computed" by Dave Nave in SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #30.*

BRIAN: Yeah.

DAK: *I guess what I'm asking is a lot of technique stuff — like, when you hadn't done it before and this was all new stuff for you, pencilling comics and inking comics, did you seek a lot of advice? How did you figure out how to do it?*

BRIAN: The best thing for me was the fact that I worked at a movie theater. That was the greatest training that anyone could have for doing comics. In between the movies letting out and me tearing tickets, I would just go into the back of the theater and watch movies all day long; that's all I did; and, after awhile, you start paying attention to individual frames, individual scenes, and the action and motion, how things move along. When I got into doing CYCOPS I found that the training I had gained from watching so many movies actually came through — so I could sort of think of the fact that this character is moving from here to here, and I *knew* where to place that character, based on seeing so many movies.

As for the actual technique of pencilling, basically the weirdest thing was that, when I started off trying to figure out how to pencil comics, I jumped on **John Byrne's** back, you know. I looked at all of the **John Byrne** comics I could get ahold of, and I got to the point where I could do **John Byrne** — probably better than **John Byrne** could! I thought, "Okay, good, I'm ready for comics now!" But it was really hard to do that. It wasn't until I just sort of loosened up and said,



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"When you do comic books, you are an

"Doing **John Byrne** is just way too much work." *(Laughter.)* "Why don't I relax and just do my fashion illustration style." So, what I came up with was something that was a bit of a hybrid between standard comic-book art and fashion illustrations. It wasn't that I was totally committing to a comic-book form; I was kind of going half way, and that made things a lot easier.

Most of my inking training comes from looking over **Karl Story's** shoulders and hanging out with **Mark Propst.** Comic-book inking is a totally different animal than inking for product illustrations. Most of the inking that I did in the commercial industry was basically done with Rapidograph pens — everything had to be absolutely perfect; there were no line variations of any sort. So, most of the inking that I do in the comics now, I have to say, I owe entirely to **Karl Story** and **Mark Propst.**

In the comics industry since I've met a lot of people; in fact, I was *lucky* enough to meet **Dan Barry** at a big party you threw at Krafthaus, when I was at almost the halfway point of CYCOPS — and he took me into the room upstairs and sat me down and said, "Okay, I'm going to go through all of your pages and tell you what you're doing right and what you're doing wrong." We spent several hours. **Dan Barry** was cool, because he's a pretty big guy and could have cared less about who I was, so he could just have taken swats at me and put down the artwork as much as he wanted to, but I was sitting there and I was *listening* to him. It really got me jazzed, because this was **Dan Barry** — this was Mr. FLASH GORDON, Mr. Black-and-White — and he was giving me advice on what I should do with my black-and-white stuff. I listened to everything he said and it made a really big difference in my approach, it made a really big difference in my style.

So, those few people started me off, and since then I've met a lot of really talented guys in the industry and I'll always trade-off with them. I always tell them how I'm doing stuff and they tell me how they're doing stuff. The industry, once you get in, it's easy to get better, because you meet a lot of people who are damn good.

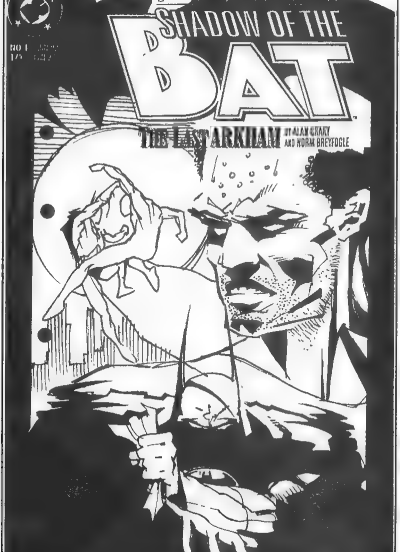
DAK: *You can cross pollinate?*

BRIAN: Yeah! *(Laughter.)* Yeah, you can continuously do that. That's one of the great things about Gaijin Studios, is the guys in there. Everyone has a different spin on comics; there's no one who is a duplicate of another person. Everyone has his own thing and it's really great. I can go to **Adam Hughes** and look over his shoulders for a couple of hours and just figure out what he's *doing*, see his approach to doing things. A lot of that ends up in my work. And there're times when I'll notice him looking over *my* shoulder and then a lot of my stuff ends up in his work. I did a story for an EXCALIBUR SPECIAL and I said, "Okay, Adam, I'm doing a Meggan story, you're going to have to sit me down and teach me how to draw large breasts on women." *(Laughter.)* We sat down and he explained exactly what templates he uses, and it really worked out for me. So there is a lot of sort of cross-breeding that goes on in comics, once you're on the inside.

JULIA: *You said that your biggest influence in doing comics and storytelling was watching movies. And a lot of comic artists have moved over into storyboarding in the film industry — is that an area that you would like to work in?*

DAK: *Before you answer: do you get your enjoyment when you're telling a comic-book story from* telling *the story or from* completing *it technically? Storyboard work is never seen by most people. Where does your satisfaction come from — would you do storyboards?*

BRIAN: Well, for me, it goes into how I feel, the difference between doing commercial work and doing comics work.



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artist — and people treat you like an *artist*."

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For me, I can't do commercial work anymore — I mean, unless I need the money. *(Laughter.)* But I can't do commercial work anymore *mainly* because of the fact that I've done comics. When you do comics you're an artist, you know, and people treat you like an *artist*. When you do commercial work, you know, you're sort of the last man on the totem pole; you're pretty much at the place where all the shit goes.

I used to do commercial jobs and I'd finish with the job and I'd know the magazine was coming out and I'd run down to the shop where the magazine was going to be and I'd flip through it and get to where my piece was and go, "Wow, look, I've got a piece in this magazine." Yeah, it's an illustration of a car or something that's part of an ad, but I'd get really excited. And then I'd sort of look next to me and there's a guy pulling down the same magazine and he's going through, and I'd think, "I bet this illustration is going to blow him away." He'd get to the page with the illustration on it and just flip it, you know, like, big deal — like he didn't even see it — and that kind of pissed me off, because I sweated for 20 hours doing that and he didn't even look at it for more than two seconds. That's what upsets me about commercial work, is that the only people who really appreciate it aren't the public — which it's designed for — but the guys at the ad agency. That kind of really defeats you when you think, "I've really *killed* myself doing this illustation and people don't even *look* at it."

JULIA: *But storyboarding pays well, and you said you wouldn't go back to doing commercial work* except *for the money. Would you consider it? Because storyboarding is kind of a cross-pollination between telling the story in comics and being able to make a lot of money, and you're not really* out *of comics because you're doing things frame by frame.*

DAK: *But you're completely anonymous.*

BRIAN: Yeah. Well, I've done storyboarding for a couple of commercials and a couple of other different things, and it *does* really pay well, but storyboarding for movies . . . that does seem like you're part of something, you know. That's the thing that really bugs me about the art in commercial work, is that your art is really just a small facet of something else. When I do commercial work the illustration is a small thing — the jar of pickles is the big thing. And when you do storyboards for movies, the storyboards that you turn in are the small

thing — the movie that it's going to be turned into is the big thing. You're just sort of a cog that helps the big thing along.

When you do an illustration for comics, when you do a panel for a comic book — that's the end product right there, that is *it*. That panel was designed for that panel — not to sell ketchup — it was designed to be that panel. That makes you feel a lot better about your art, that you're doing your work *for* the art's sake. The only side of commercial work that I think I'd possibly want to get into is maybe doing movie posters. Movie posters are to promote the movie — but are still an end product in itself. And a lot of my favorite illustrators do movie posters.

JULIA: *Would you like to do posters for comic books?*

BRIAN: I'm actually going to be getting into doing some posters sometime soon; I'm talking with the guys at Marvel about doing some stuff. And I'd like to bend DC's arm — DC is sort of squeamish about doing posters — and see if I can get them to do some stuff. I'd really like to get more into that. I'm getting some good responses from the guys at Marvel, so I'm going to actually get into that. And that's a lot of fun. The art is more important, the art becomes the end product; after you've felt that, it doesn't matter how many thousands of dollars that people throw at you — you really have to treat your artwork for art's sake.

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"In a sense, I'm sort of living a dream."

THE LAST SUPERHERO art TM & © 1992 Zimmerman & Kraft.

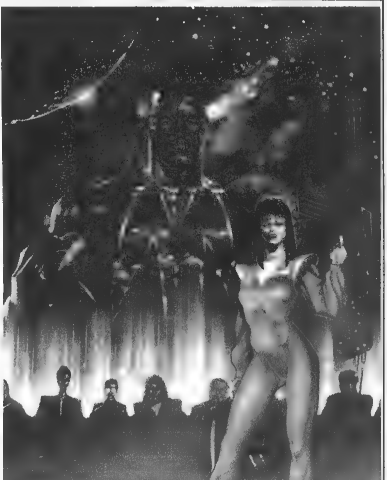
would be really easy to do that, and I wouldn't have to work the whole year to do that. But no one would know or care who I was. In comics there's a whole ton of people out there buying your product that really like what *you* are doing. It's not the product that you're selling — they like what *you* are doing, and that's something that's attractive. I like my art being looked at; I like the fact that people just care about the work itself. Once you've felt that, I can't see why anybody would go back to doing commercial art unless it paid *really* well.

DAK: *That's your course, to stay in comics?*

BRIAN: Yeah. I did a little bit of everything getting — before I got into comics I did, like, everything that an artist could possibly do. I played around with fine art, architectural illustrations, commercial illustrations, everything that you can think of, and I always got *bored* with it. Even when I was doing something as exciting as fashion illustration and there were these huge six-foot women wanting me to draw pictures of them, while that was a lot of fun and I really enjoyed it, after awhile I got bored with it; after awhile it just wasn't exciting anymore. I wanted to do something else. And with architectural illustrations, I pushed it as far as I could and I got bored with it; I wanted to do something else. I just kept jumping from one field to another.

The thing about comics is, now I'm actually doing *everything*, everything that I've ever trained to do — I'm doing a little bit of fashion illustration, a little bit of architectural illustration, a little bit of commercial illustration, a little bit of product illustration — in every book that I do, in every cover that I do. So, in a sense, comics is the greatest thing for me — because I *like* doing everything. I like all the different facets of art, you now. I'm not one of those guys who can be happy drawing little tiny pictures of telephones for the rest of his life; I have to have a little bit of everything, and in comics I can *do* little pictures of telephones in some panels, and I can do pictures of six-foot women in other panels. I think comics rounds me out. And I can't get bored with it, because there's always something new.

I used to read about **J.C. Leyendecker** and **Dean Cornwell** and **Maxfield Parrish** and the romance of those times, I mean the romance that *all* the public was just so jazzed about the work that they were doing, and people would run out to



Awesome cover for unpublished LAST SUPERHERO graphic album.

the newsstands to pick up copies of THE SATURDAY EVENING POST — just to see these guys' work. I used to think that that time was gone, that time doesn't exist anymore, because of radio and TV no one could really give a damn about these people and about illustrations on magazine covers.

And then, when I got into doing comics, I actually found out that that time was still around, people still *do* get excited when they see a magazine cover from a certain artist. In a sense, I'm sort of living kind of a dream, in that I know that people are going to the comic-book shops and they're seeing my covers and they're getting excited about it — that's the stuff I've been *reading* about, that's the stuff that I always *wanted* to do. I wanted to be one of those guys who people actually wait for a cover to come out with their work, and get really jazzed about it.

That's something that's so exciting, just being one of those guys, one of those artists, and living the life that you've read about. Not really so much making *tons* of money like **Cornwell** and **Leyendecker,** but doing for the public what *they* did the for the public. Comics, I think, is the last hold-out for art appreciation. With commercial art it's gotten to the point where you can't tell an illustration from a photo — and it doesn't matter, you don't care if it's an illustration, you don't care if it's a photo.

But in comics people *care*.

People care about the artwork; and not only do people care about the artwork, they care about the artists. And people will go to a convention and they'll line up at a table to see an artist, and they'll line up to see writers — it feels great! It feels great to be part of this time. I'm actually *part* of it! I'm actually feeling what they probably felt, so in a sense I'm actually walking in the footsteps of heroes of mine.

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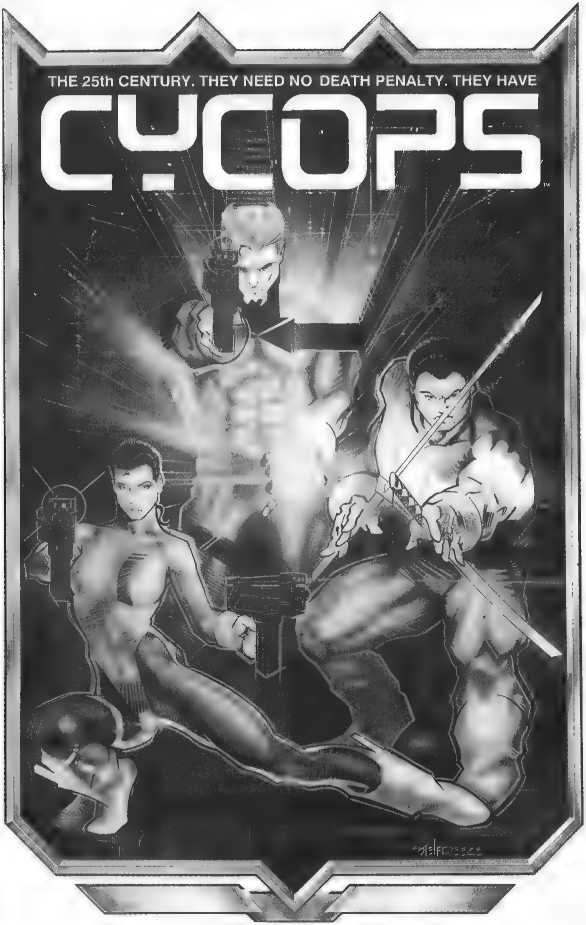
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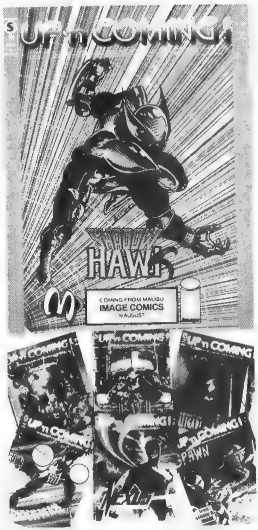

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SkyBox "started in 1989 to distribute sports cards."

When was the first trading card printed? Why was it printed? The inside story might surprise you. Supplying the answers to those and many other questions is George White, Vice President of Public Affairs for what was once widely and well known as the line of Impel Trading Cards — but which has undergone a metamorphosis as we go to press to emerge under a new monicker: SkyBox. With the birth of the Marvel Universe trading cards it appears that a new niche has been developed for non-sports, or entertainment cards, as SkyBox refers to them. Sandra Dincher dropped in on the gang and filed this interesting interview . . .

SANDRA DINCHER: *I have to ask, Phoenix plays a role in your company name and Phoenix is also a major, major character at Marvel. Any connection?*

GEORGE WHITE: No, just coincidence. Phoenix Communications has been around since 1981 and we didn't start working with Marvel or Impel since 1990. Although, we all have our Phoenix trading cards now. *(Laughter.)*

SANDRA: *I have to ask about the history of Impel; they seem to be an overnight success.*

GEORGE: Impel was started in 1989 by providing a sales force to distribute Pro Set football and hockey cards. They did that clear up until 1991. During the 1989-1990 basketball season Impel came out with the first trading card of their very own, which was NBA HOOPS. NBA HOOPS exploited the basketball trading card market — which was their first huge success. In the 1990-1991 season they came out with NBA SKYBOX cards. Because of the success of Impel's basketball cards you will now find quite a few companies producing basketball trading cards.

SANDRA: *There seem to be cards for everything. I've seen hockey, PGA Tour cards, and the list goes on and on.*

GEORGE: Actually, Impel's sales agreement ended with PRO SET this year so we're no longer associated with PRO SET. Early on the Impel task force was also the Ligget-Meyers tobacco task force. In July of 1991 Impel split, so that

GEORGE WHITE

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"The cards allow fans of entertainment to interact.

they now sell nothing but trading cards.

SANDRA: *Is Impel still associated with a cigarette company?*

GEORGE: No, the only connection is that Impel and Ligget are owned by the same central holding company. In the fall of 1990, with the success of NBA HOOPS, Impel successfully negotiated a licensing agreement with Marvel Entertainment Group to produce their first set of trading cards.

Interesting was the fact that the cards didn't sell well at first. Once the word got out they started to sell — sell to the point that the first Marvel Universe trading cards were the hottest trading cards on the market. We then came out with a second series, Marvel Universe II, and that was sold out at the wholesale level before we even printed the cards.

This year, due to the success of the Marvel cards, and the interest in the entertainment trading card market, Impel has vigorously pursued agreements with quite a few companies. In addition to the licensing agreement with the number-one comic-producing company, Marvel, they also have licensed with DC, the number-two comics company. Plus, Impel has licensing agreements with Disney, GI Joe (Hasbro), TERMINATOR, AN AMERICAN TAIL, Pro Wrestling cards, the ABC shows FULL HOUSE, PERFECT STRANGERS, and FAMILY MATTERS. While Impel was expanding the entertainment line of cards they were also active in their pursuit of sports cards. There is an Olympics lines as well as a Minor League Baseball line of cards called Line Drive.

I should also mention a multi-licensing agreement, Trading Card Treats. It is in conjunction with the National Safe Kids Campaign. There will be six separate lines of cards which were out for Halloween. Marvel, Widget, Archie, Nintendo, Inspector Gadget, and Universal Monsters will all be involved in the Trading Card Treats line. The growth has been such for Impel that they are now the second largest trading card company in the world only behind Topps. Topps has been the King Kong of the trading card industry due to their monopoly with the production of baseball trading cards. Impel is number one in entertainment cards.

SANDRA: *Why do they call them enteriainment cards as opposed to non-sports cards?*

GEORGE: Because we feel that "non-sports" is telling something that it *isn't* and we want to tell what it *is*. Entertainment is exactly what it is. The entertainment category covers every American — because every American consumes some sort of entertainment.

We feel that we are providing quality entertainment."

Sports is a portion of entertainment, but it's a minority of the larger entertainment pie. The cards allow the fans of entertainment, whether it's Marvel Comics or wrestling, to interact. We feel that we are providing quality entertainment for less than a buck!

SANDRA: *One of the questions I have to ask, and that I'm sure comic-reading fans will be interested in, is where does the artwork come from for the cards and, more importantly, where does it end up? Original artwork is turning into a huge industry.*

GEORGE: That question involves a bit of history concerning the trading card industry. The first trading cards were not sports cards. The first card was a Canadian government card in 1879. The original cards were produced by tobacco companies as a stiffener for cigarette packs. At first the inserts were just plain cardboard, so people wouldn't flatten their cigarettes when they put them in their pockets. Then, someone got the idea, "why not put something on the cardboard?" Of the 500 sets done in the 1880s only 25 sets were sports. The rest were things like geography and political stuff.

When **James Duke** came out with the cigarette-making machine he put the other cigarette companies out of business; there was no longer any reason to do promotional cards.

In the 1930s a company called Gum Inc. started producing cards as a way to sell candy. The success of that company was that they negotiated licensing agreements with companies that already had powerful entertainment products and then got those companies to execute the cards. Impel has taken that recipe for success and done the same thing. When we negotiated with Marvel we knew that the reason people liked Marvel comics was because of the great characters and the great writers, and more so, the great artists working on the stories. We couldn't see the reasoning behind licensing Marvel characters and then not having their artists do the artwork.

Also, rather than reprint work out of the comics we thought, "Why not have all original artwork?" For example, you can consider the Silver Surfer card as an original art print. The artwork is specifically commissioned for Impel trading cards. Marvel assigned the particular artists to work on the cards.

SANDRA: *Where does the artwork go after the cards are printed?*

GEORGE: The artwork is transferred to computer and then transferred to Impel to be printed.

SANDRA: *You're not going to tell me where the original artwork went to, are you?* (Laughter.)

GEORGE: The artwork is exclusively held in the licensing agreement between Impel and Marvel.

SANDRA: *The reason I ask this is because original comic-book art is becoming very popular. The pages of artwork are returned to the artist and/or inker, who can then sell them for additional income. If Impel or someone had the original artwork from the trading cards it would be worth quite a bit of money.*

GEORGE: The thing at Impel is that we're in the business of helping fans connect with entertainment. The card is our market and we're not interested in the secondary market.

SANDRA: *What about animation cels? You've done some work along those lines, in particular the Disney material.*

GEORGE: A good example of our Disney cards is card #73, two cels from

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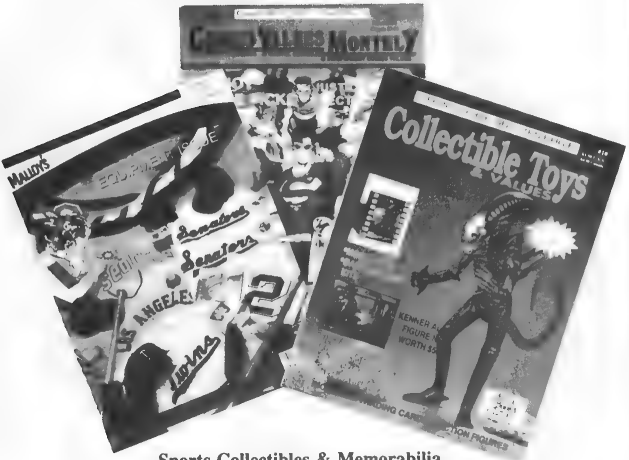

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"We license from Ted Turner, Hanna-Barbera, Disney . . ."

THE MAD DOCTOR, a Disney short that came out in the 1930s. That particular cel is of interest because it is in black-and-white and we didn't want to change it by adding color. Disney went through 12,000 cels, from 11 different shorts, and chose 17 for inclusion in the card set. It's actually 18 cards, nine front and back, with the 18th card being a synopsis of the story. Normally we don't deal in black-and-white but we didn't want to change a thing.

SANDRA: *You didn't want to upset Ted Turner!* (Laughter.)

GEORGE: Actually, we license from Ted Turner because of the WCW wrestling stuff and Hanna-Barbera. In the case of the Disney product we're using existing cels. Also, the movie material are all shots from the film itself.

SANDRA: *I'd like your specific thoughts on some of the sets of cards produced by Impel. Let's start with the Marvel cards.*

GEORGE: Yes, officially The Official Trading Card of the Marvel Super-Heroes. Series One came out in the fall of 1990. There were 162 cards in the set plus five bonus holograms. Series One had the character in an action pose and the information box carried the character's won/loss record. They also had a "Did You Know?" box along with their vital statistics and group affiliation. Stuff that Marvel fans would like to know about. Series Two was different enough to show that it was a different series of cards from the first set. It had the year 1991 on the card.

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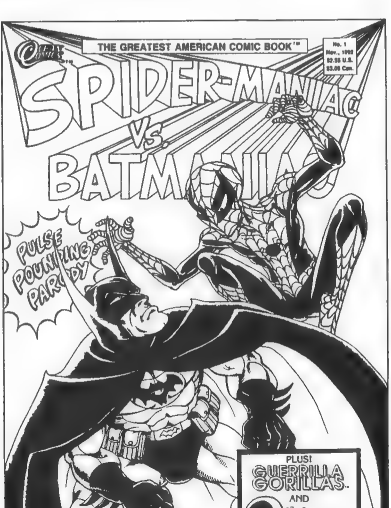

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"We want to appeal to all fans, not just those I call loyalist."

SANDRA: *Which implies that there will be a series this year, and in 1993, and so on.*

GEORGE: Actually, we'll talk about that in a little bit. In Series Two we went with power ratings which were done up by Marvel editors. It measures the characters in six different areas on a scale of zero to seven. This enables people to compare meetings between, for example, Magneto and the Silver Surfer. This gives the cards a bit of inter-action and we envision kids sitting down and actually talking about the cards.

SANDRA: *I suppose that would be handy in a role-playing sort of way.*

GEORGE: Exactly, and we retained the "Did You Know" section, because we found it to be very successful.

SANDRA: *How do you determine whether or not something is successful?*

GEORGE: We do a lot of focus group work. We talk to owners of comic-book stores and solicit their responses. We also recruit kids through a screening process. We pick kids that have to have the new X-MEN or SPIDER-MAN book the second it comes out, along with the kid that might read the book at a friend's house. We want to be popular with all of the ~~fans, not just, the~~ group of ~~fans that I call loyalists.~~

SANDRA: *You mean Marvel Zombies?*

GEORGE: I guess in this case, yes, zombies.

SANDRA: *Did you know that Marvel Zombie is trademarked?* (Laughter.)

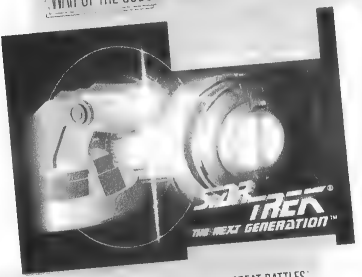
GEORGE: Right, that's why I use the word loyalist, so I don't get in trouble for using a trademark. *(More laughter.)* I guess now would be a good time to mention that Series Three of the Marvel Universe cards will be out this summer!

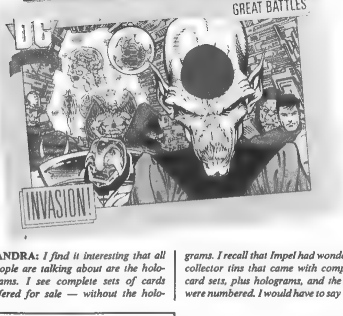
SANDRA: *And what is going to make this series special?*

GEORGE: That you'll have to wait for! Of course, we'll be trying to make it better than Series Two.

SANDRA: *One of the differences I found between Series One and Series Two was that I was more likely to get all of the holograms in a single box of thirty-six wax packs for Series One as I was for Series Two. I've had people tell me that there was less of a frequency of holograms distributed in Series Two.*

GEORGE: That's really not true and is actually a rumor that started because some of the early boxes got out that had less holograms in them than the corresponding number of boxes in the first set. There are the same number of holograms produced with Series Two as there were with Series One.





SANDRA: *I find it interesting that all people are talking about are the holograms. I see complete sets of cards offered for sale — without the holograms. I recall that Impel had wonderful collector tins that came with complete card sets, plus holograms, and the tins were numbered. I would have to say they*

"There will be a new X-FORCE Sentinel character

were for the, how would you say it, the wealthier investor . . .?

GEORGE: Actually, those were for the loyalists.

SANDRA: *Right, the loyalists.* (Laughter.) *Is this a sort of package deal that we will continue to see associated with the Marvel cards?*

GEORGE: The issue of bonus cards and such is one that the trading card industry deals with all of the time. What we find in all of our research is that everyone thinks that the idea of a special card is great. Obviously, if the fans had their way, you'd get an entire set of holograms every time you purchased a pack of cards. The problem with that is that it would take away from the specialness of the card and make the price of the pack out of sight. The cost of producing the hologram card is very expensive compared to the regular cards.

SANDRA: *Getting back to the collector tin and the various forms of packaging. I'm a semi-mature adult — all I really want is one of everything. That's all I really want. It's fun to open the packs but it gets to be a pain for an adult. Is there an option being considered for the collector that just wants one of everything without the hassle?*

GEORGE: For the collector we find that they either buy an entire shelf box, and if you want to get a complete set it's better to buy an entire shelf box rather than purchasing them pack by pack. Or else the collector will wait and buy the entire set from a card shop.

SANDRA: *Has Impel thought about putting together say, a binder or album offering the entire set of cards along with holograms, that sort of thing?*

GEORGE: Right now the album is available as a bounce-back item offered on the wax pack. The album is just that, an empty album. We feel that the collector tins fit the needs of the loyalists.

SANDRA: *Speaking as a zombie or loyalist I would prefer to get the binder with the cards in them simply because the collector tin is a numbered edition and the collector in me tells me not to open it. It's a lot like the first issue of X-FORCE, which was a bagged comic with a collector card in it. No one wants to open the bags to even look at the comic or get the card out. It's a collector mentality. I can't even tell you if the X-Force cards are Impel cards or not.*

GEORGE: Actually, it is an Impel card, and it's interesting in the fact that the card has really increased in price because there aren't that many cards in circulation — for the very reason you mentioned. We try to cater to all of the factions, from the loyalists, fanatics, amateurs to the casual collector.

SANDRA: *Marvel has developed a new fan club, Wild Agents of Marvel, or WAM for short, and rumor has it that members will be receiving complete sets of the X-Force trading cards in the mail.*

GEORGE: I don't know anything about

introduced via the card line. Jim Lee is the creator."

that, but then again things happen without my knowledge. *(Note: Since this interview was conducted members of WAM, Marvel's fan club, have received complete sets of the X-Force trading cards in the mail.)*

SANDRA: *Let's talk about the Jim Lee X-Men trading cards.*

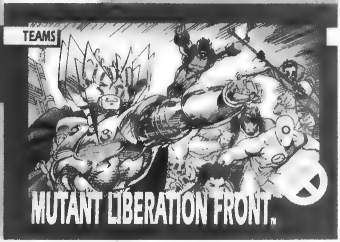
GEORGE: The set consists of 100 cards and is drawn by **Jim Lee.** The set is interesting for a number of reasons. There's going to be a new X-FORCE Sentinel character introduced via the card line. **Jim Lee** is the creator of the character. And for the first time there will be gold-foiled hologram cards. There will be five different hologram cards packaged randomly in the wax packs. One difference with the **Jim Lee** X-MEN cards is that they will be sold six to a pack. We've put them in smaller packs and made them roughly half the price. At retail we expect them to sell anywhere from a quarter to forty cents. We want to make them cheap enough that all of the kids can buy them.

SANDRA: *Interesting that you mention that price range, since I received a catalog that was advertising the cards at seventy-nine cents a pack.*

GEORGE: Well, then they're making a lot of money off of them.

SANDRA: *In other words, they're ripping people off.*

GEORGE: I'm not going to say that. Retailers can charge whatever they want to. What I'm saying is that most retailers



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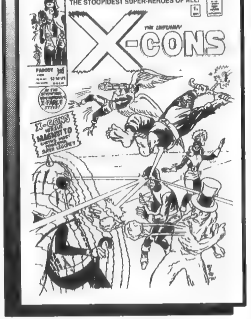

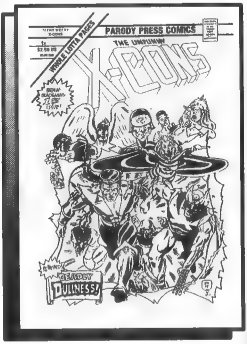

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"Impel has a strong consumer relations department."

will sell them at the prices I mentioned. The shelf packs will will have thirty-six packs in them, but only half the cards, because there will be six instead of twelve cards per wax pack.

SANDRA: *Tell us a little about the Cosmic Cards, which will be the DC series of cards. I've seen samples of the cards and they're gorgeous. Are they the same as the Marvel cards, as far as original artwork is concerned?*

GEORGE: Right, all original artwork by DC artists. If you look on the back of the card, you will notice that we actually have the name of the penciller and inker on the cards. Comics fans love to follow artists and such. For example, the diehard fan would know that **Jill Thompson** did the artwork on the Wonder Woman card without looking on the back of it. We also worked with DC on the design of the card. We have a one-paragraph story on the back of the card along with a little question-and-answer piece.

SANDRA: *One thing that strikes me about the cards is that the DC symbol is an inverted triangle symble and is not the world-famous DC bullet. Why?*

GEORGE: DC designed it and felt that it looked better than the bullet.

SANDRA: *Is DC considering dropping the bullet?*

GEORGE: Oh God, not that I know of.

SANDRA: *I like the look of the card. It's very stunning. The back of the card is interesting. It almost resembles a driver's license type of thing, with the little photo and such.*

GEORGE: The idea was to let people buying the cards see what people look like behind the mask. If you look at the Flash card you see the Flash in costume. If you turn the card over you can see what Wally West looks like. There are 180 cards in the set with ten Hall of Fame holograms. Disney and G.I. Joe were the largest sets we've done, with 210 cards. All of the Impel entertainment card sets are much larger than older entertainment sets that ran anywhere from thirty to sixty cards.

SANDRA: *And even though the sets are so large, I'm sure you hear from comic fans that say you left out their favorite character?*

GEORGE: Oh sure, we always get that. Impel has a very strong consumer relations department and we respond to every letter we get. We always get letters saying, "I can't believe you left out this person or that." Interestingly, we got the most letters on that concerning the G.I. Joe characters, because there are just so many of them. We take all of the comments into consideration when we plan the next series of a set of cards.

SANDRA: *Well, I hope there's a Ma and Pa Kent card to go with the DC cards! If there isn't, shame, shame!* (Laughter.) *The biggest, most serious flaw I see with the DC cards is the lack of a Batman card. I mean, come on, this is DC!*

GEORGE: The problem with that is that the license for Batman is a separate license for DC and that license was and still is held by Topps. The reason for that is because of the movies. with BATMAN RETURNS opening this summer I'm sure there will be Batman cards.

SANDRA: *Will they be comic-related cards?*

GEORGE: I won't attempt to speak for Topps. The card set released from the first BATMAN movie just concerned itself with stills from the movie. Batman, Robin, and associated characters are not in our set of cards, along with Swamp Thing and associated characters.

SANDRA: *A good crossover set of cards is the STAR TREK cards. It seems that quite a few comic fans also cross over into the world of STAR TREK. We've just celebrated twenty-five years of*

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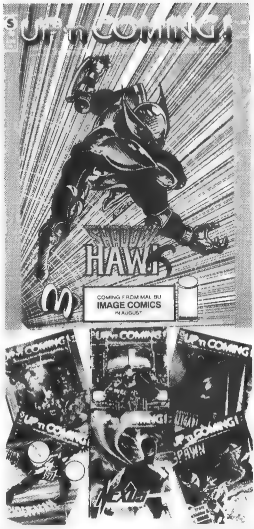

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"More people can relate to STAR TREK than Marvel."

STAR TREK while at the same time losing Gene Roddenberry, who created the entire mythos. I really loved the fact that Impel decided to mark the cards as either Next Generation or Trek Classic. I have friends who would rather not buy any cards rather than getting some of the "wrong" generation.

GEORGE: That's what our research found. While quite a few people are fans of both, there are fans that like one and hate the other. Not only are the cards designed this way but they're also packaged that way so you know what you're buying.

SANDRA: *Some of the comments I heard concerning the original STAR TREK cards was that, because of the simple set designs and such, some of the cards looked pathetic. Especially next to the Next Generation cards. Is that something that could be improved on?*

GEORGE: The original cels are the original cels. You can only enhance them so much. There are some cards that deal with the DC Comics version of STAR TREK.

SANDRA: *Will there be any comics references in the new Series Two STAR TREK cards?*

GEORGE: The series is really about the success of the TV series.

SANDRA: *Will there be a series of cards that deals with the success of the movies?*

GEORGE: Obviously, we have a licensing agreement with Paramount — so anything is possible.

SANDRA: *This may be totally wrong, but it seemed to me that the STAR TREK cards didn't sell very well.*

GEORGE: They sold very well. In fact, they sold faster than any product we've ever had, except for the Marvel Two series. STAR TREK is something that more people can relate to than, say, Marvel Comics, even.

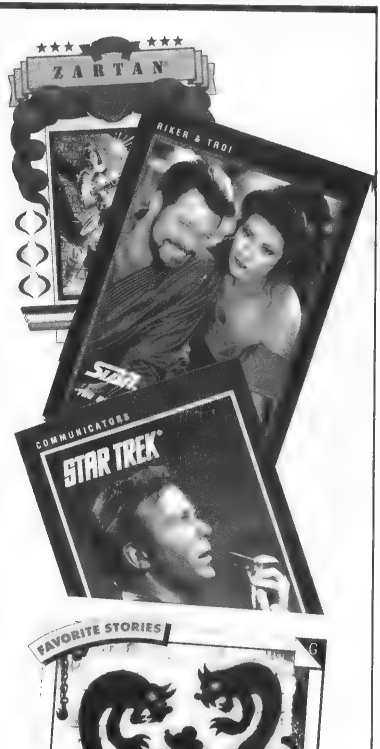
SANDRA: *Marvel has their own little extra universe with their United Kingdom division. Is there a chance of any separate cards for the U.K. branch?*

GEORGE: We have brainstorming sessions with Marvel all of the time. We are interested in international licensing and such. I can say that in 1992 there will be three Marvel sets: The X-Men cards, Marvel Universe Three, and a Premium Marvel card.

SANDRA: *I've not heard about the premium card.*

GEORGE: It's tentatively titled Marvel Masterworks. Masterworks may change, as far as the name — but these will be the best of the best, as far as cards go.

SANDRA: *Let's talk about the number*



"We recently surveyed 22,000 households. We found

one children's entertainment property — Disney. I love Disney, as do my two kids. My kids are two and five and they also love anything that has to do with Disney. You have the new MINNIE 'N' ME cards. Tell me more about them.

GEORGE: They are the first cards targeted towards little girls and moms. They're interactive cards for mom and her daughter. On the front of the card is original art of Minnie doing various things and on the back it has games, puzzles, things girls can do with their mom or their friends.

SANDRA: *If I'm any type of gauge they're doing well because I buy them for my daughters. I like to give them cards as a treat, instead of candy.*

GEORGE: It's also nice because they can be used as a learning tool. The copy is written for young girls to read easily.

SANDRA: *Any other plans for future Minnie cards?*

GEORGE: We are in the planning stage of a second series of MINNIE 'N' ME cards. We're also planning a Series Two of Disney Collector cards. The Disney cards are something that everyone from all ages can relate to; I sent these Disney cards to my grandmother, who is 88 years old, and she thought they were great! I have high hopes that these particular cards will lead to a major expansion in the entertainment card business. We've found that a little over half of the cards purchased are purchased by parents.

SANDRA: *Let's talk Stephen Spielberg.*

GEORGE: AMERICAN TAIL: FIEVEL GOES WEST collector cards. These were released with the movie and we gave out five million sample cards at theaters during the first week of the movie. I'm a little old for FIEVEL but the cards are great! Once again, the cards are shot from cels from the movie. We

that females now buy 36% of the entertainment cards."

used our marketing tools and went with bigger print on the back of the cards, which would be easier for the younger kids to read.

SANDRA: *It seems that you do so well with your cards because of your market research.*

GEORGE: We recently surveyed 22,000 households to see who buys cards. What we found — excluding sports cards, which are overwhelmingly male — is that females now buy thirty-six percent of the entertainment cards. Guess what type of card is purchased by a majority of females?

SANDRA: *I don't know, not football cards, although if they took a closer look at some of the football cards maybe more females would buy them.* (Laughter.)

GEORGE: If you lump all of the different music variety cards into one category, sixty percent of them are bought by girls. It's the only category of card that the majority of buyers are female.

SANDRA: *How did the Halloween Treat cards go over?*

GEORGE: Very well. They were sold in twenty-four packs with three cards in each pack. You could buy a bag of any of the six licenses we talked about earlier. What we're trying to do is ask parents to give out cards instead of candy. We went to the National Safe Kids Campaign, which is dedicated to the reduction of childhood injury, and we designed the cards so that at least one out of every six had a safety message on it. The Hulk card, for example, says, "Did you know, that when making one of his giant-sized leaps, Hulk always looks before he leaps to avoid crashing into low-flying aircraft." Kids don't like being preached to but if you can work the safety message into the entertainment they'll listen.

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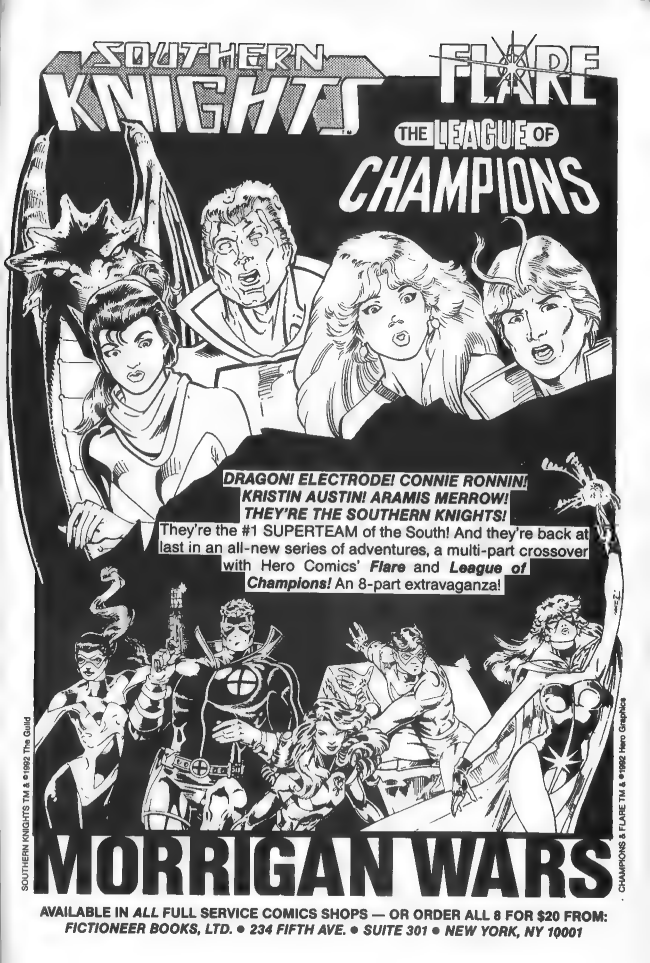
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ATTENTION ERB EXPERTS!

Dear Dave,

Thanks for sending me along the OAK LEAVES info. Enclosed is a check for THE COMPLEAT OAK LEAVES and issues #13-16.

It was a real pleasure talking with you . . . not too many **Otis Adelbert Kline** fans around here, I'm afraid. Next week I head down to the Library of Congress where I hope to sniff out some trace of that lost Mars manuscript we discussed. I'll let you know what happens. If I come up dry I have a couple other ideas.

I believe you mentioned you're a fan of the Tarzan books. I'm curious to know if anyone has ever produced a comprehensive map of Tarzan's Africa. Many years ago I mapped the first nine books and found them surprisingly consistent, given the nature of the series. I've had it in the back of my mind to someday produce such a map using an historical atlas of Africa so as to approximate the materials ERB had at hand. I'd like to know if you've heard of anyone who has already done this.

Philip Fischer
4775 Sykesville Rd.
Sykesville, MD 21784-7009

Publishing your letter here is the best way I know to get the word out to those who might know, Philip — it certainly seems like something that must have been done somewhere at sometime by someone! Now if only that long-lost HUNTERS OF MARS manuscript by ERB contemporary Otis Adelbert Kline would turn up, we'd all be in for a rare reading treat. Anyone out there have any ideas?

— DAK

REFUTES "GLADIATOR ETHIC"

Dear DAK;

In #113, you printed a letter from **Garret Michaels,** purporting to "prove" **Dennis Mallonee** wrong in his contentions concerning Marvel's drive to squeeze everyone else out of the comics market.

Tsk, **Mr. Michaels.** Tsk tsk. A letter such as yours doesn't "prove" anything. It merely offers another point of view — as does this one.

There are two ways a company can enlarge its market share: It can increase its own sales, or it can decrease those of its competitors. In a market of more-or-less fixed size, such as (to use an oft-cited example) that of soft drinks, these goals are roughly identical — you can't get more for yourself without taking something from someone else. But in a market with great potential for expansion, such as that of comic books, it is quite possible to accomplish one goal without the other.

However, in *any* kind of market, no company will achieve a 100% share without destroying its competitors utterly and without compunction. This leads to a situation devoid of the diversity in which he believes "the industry as a whole benefits." If an industry lacks the benefits of such diversity it will (as I concur in his belief) wither. And what good is it to hold 100% of a pie, when the pie itself is shrinking?

Thus, in the long run, a company does itself a disservice if it succeeds in totally eliminating its competition.

I submit that the cutthroat, dog-eat-dog style of marketing that he cites as the "one goal and one goal only" of a smart company is inappropriate to the comics industry. A little sniping at the competition — sure, that's going to happen, and a certain amount of it is healthy because it keeps people on their toes.

But for a company interested primarily in its own prosperity — as opposed to fixing itself blindly to the eat-or-be-eaten Gladiator Ethic, which in the long run produces more casualties than sales — the *first* goal must be to increase its own size, which can be done most efficaciously by enlarging the market itself. When the market is as large as it is ever likely to get — *that's* the time for each company to turn on its competitors and try to devour them.

And the comics industry is a long way yet from being as large as it's ever likely to get.

Don Markstein
14836 N. 35th St.
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APARO CULT SEEKS SALVATION

Dear Mr. Kraft:

Greetings. You may remember me from a few years ago when I once wrote asking if you could provide an interview with **Jim Aparo.** Your response was kind, but naturally disappointing, since you said no one was available to conduct one at the time.

I've been following your magazine earnestly since then, and have oftn been pleased by your choices of interviewees: ranging from the latest fan-fave to the retired veteran. As I'm sure you've guessed by now, I'm writing again asking for a **Jim Aparo** interview, since he's never made it in your fine publication.

There are many exciting Bat-projects under way at DC as you well now, and **Mr. Aparo** will be playing a major part in that exposure in BATMAN, which he is now pencilling, inking and lettering. What more appropriate time to conduct an interview with him?

I'm making this request as a fan, and as publisher of THE JIM APARO FAN CLUB NEWSLETTER. We'd all be very excited about such an event in COMICS INTERVIEW, and certainly give you all the support we can for that issue.

Chris Khalaf
P.O. Box 925142
Houston, TX 77292-51452

You know what they say, Chris: If you want something done right, do it yourself. Consider this your invitation to interview Aparo for an appearance right here in the pages of this, the mightiest interview mag of them all! We'll all be looking forward to the results. See you soon!

— DAK

INTERVIEW welcomes your thoughts and comments in the Last Word. Send your correspondence to: DAK, COMICS INTERVIEW, 234 Fifth Ave., Suite 301, New York, NY 10001, or fax your letter to (404) 782-6625. Please include your name and address.

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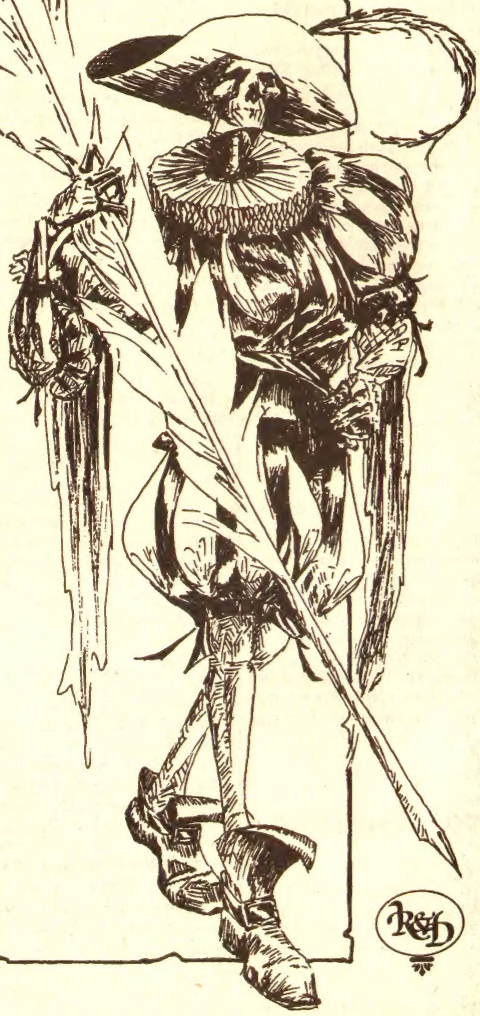
Sequitur



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